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**Analiza idei i motywów platońskich  
w powieściach Iris Murdoch**

**Rozprawa doktorska**

**Praca napisana pod kierunkiem  
prof. dr hab. Barbary Kowalik**

**Warszawa, 2016**

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**An Analysis of Platonic Ideas and Motifs in the Novels of  
Iris Murdoch**

**A doctoral dissertation written under the  
supervision of prof. dr hab. Barbara Kowalik**

**Warsaw, 2016**

## Table of Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	3
<b>Introduction</b>	4
<b>I. Plato's Allegory of the Cave and Iris Murdoch's Use of Imagery and Space</b>	20
I.1 The interpretation of the Allegory of the Cave in Murdoch's philosophical essays	20
I.2 The enclosed spaces similar to the Platonic Cave in Murdoch's Novels	26
I.3 The world of shadows. Murdoch's depiction of the state of <i>eikasia</i> and Plato's distrust of sensory data	40
I.4 The Images of the fire and the sun: the characters' development in the light of the Platonic model	47
I.5 The role of violence in the process of leaving the Cave	58
I.6 The limits of human cognition: the Murdochian balance between discarding illusion and preserving myth	65
I.7 Similarities between Plato's use of metaphor in <i>The Republic</i> and Murdoch's writing style employing metaphorical imagery	72
<b>II. Plato's Dialectic in Iris Murdoch's Narratives</b>	79
II.1 Socratic dialogue as a genre conducive to education: the relationship between the generic form and content	81
II.2 In search of contemporary sophists: Plato's dialogues and Murdoch's characterization	88
II.2.i The figures of writers and artists	90
II.2.ii The characters of psychoanalysts	103

II.3 The use of dialectical practice and dialogue in Murdoch's novels	110
II.4 The pedagogic aspect of Murdoch's 'dialectical' novels	136
<b>III. The Role of Cultural Heritage in Plato's Dialogues and Iris Murdoch's Fiction</b>	<b>141</b>
III.1 Poets and rhapsodes as the preservers of cultural heritage and the sources of influence in Plato's dialogues	141
III.2 The influence of cultural heritage on the characters' outlook in Murdoch's novels	150
III.3 Murdoch's use of intertextuality in the depiction of human consciousness as the echo of Plato's description of <i>eikasia</i>	162
III.4 From a fictional hero to a real-life moral agent. The link between cultural products and moral choices in Murdoch's fiction	176
III.5 Depiction of the reader's experience in Murdoch's novels	188
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>204</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>216</b>

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my special gratitude to my advisor prof. dr hab. Barbara Kowalik for the continuous support of my doctoral study and related research. Her patience, motivation and all her contributions of time and ideas made my doctoral experience productive and stimulating. Her guidance helped me in all the time of research and writing of this thesis. I could not have imagined having a better advisor and mentor for my doctoral study.

My sincere thanks also go to my family for supporting me spiritually throughout writing this thesis.

## Introduction

Iris Murdoch, a world-famous prolific novelist and an increasingly influential moral philosopher, was one of the most intriguing figures in the intellectual landscape of post-war Europe. Her unique *oeuvre* which combines philosophical inclinations with a passion for literature continues to spur interest in her works and ideas. Acclaimed by literary critics, who have praised her insightfulness and wit, Murdoch managed to mark her presence in the consciousness of her contemporaries and almost two decades after her death she continues to resonate strongly with new generations of readers.

Murdoch's exceptional intellectual constitution displayed in her fiction is grounded in her excellent education. Born in 1919 in Dublin, in her early childhood Murdoch moved with her parents to England where she enjoyed the privilege of attending unusual and prestigious schools, the Froebel Institute and Badminton. She read Classics at Somerville College, Oxford and studied philosophy at Newnham College, Cambridge. Her outstanding academic accomplishments gained Murdoch a Tutorial Fellowship in Philosophy at St Anne's College, Oxford where she taught for over fifteen years. In 1963-67 she continued her teaching career as lecturer in Philosophy at the Royal College of Art in London.

This successful career in academia was complemented by an equally successful writing career. From 1954, the year in which her first novel *Under the Net* was published, Murdoch continued to develop as an artist. Awarded the Booker Prize, the James Tait Black Memorial Prize and the Golden PEN Award, she spent most of her life publishing her writing and actively participating in discussions concerning ethical and moral issues. After a dramatic battle with Alzheimer's disease, Murdoch died in 1999 leaving a colossal *oeuvre* of twenty-six novels, two poetry collections, several plays, one short story and some substantial pieces of work on continental philosophy from Plato to Kant and from Hegel to Sartre.<sup>1</sup>

During her life Murdoch showed interest in ideas originating in various disciplines ranging from Ancient philosophy, Christian theology and Buddhism, to nineteenth-century canonical writers like Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, George Eliot and Proust, the political thought of

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<sup>1</sup> Murdoch wrote a first monograph about Jean-Paul Sartre published in English, *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist* (1953). She also wrote a book of moral philosophy *The Sovereignty of Good* (1970) which comprises her three previously published papers: "The Idea of Perfection", "On 'God' and 'Good'" and "The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts". The papers contain Murdoch's response to the views of Plato, Simone Weil, Stuart Hampshire, Kant, Freud and Marx. *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (1992) is Murdoch's another piece of work on philosophy. The book is a revised and expanded version of Murdoch's 1982 Gifford Lectures and elaborates among others on Plato, Kant, Hegel, Buddhist philosophers, Schopenhauer and Derrida.

Marx, and Freud's psychoanalysis. The list of conceptual sources providing Murdoch with material for reflection is thus extensive and encompasses ideas that were formulated in Ancient Greece as well as the most compelling and exciting theories originating in the twentieth century.

The years she spent at university provided Murdoch with an opportunity to make lasting friendships and she was acquainted with the leading figures of the contemporary philosophical scene. The bonds between Murdoch and Philippa Foot, Mary Midgley and Elizabeth Anscombe were formed during her first years at Oxford. Among the moralists, logicians and language-analysts who left an indelible impression on her one should also mention the names of Gilbert Ryle, Richard Mervyn Hare, Stuart Hampshire, Alfred Jules Ayer and Charles Stevenson.

The list of people whose presence is markedly indicated in Murdoch's intellectual life would not be properly assembled if the name of Ludwig Wittgenstein were not included. From 1947-48 Murdoch held the Sarah Smithson studentship in philosophy at Newham College, Cambridge. Although she was not formally taught by Wittgenstein, she met him at that time and remained deeply influenced by his philosophy throughout her career.

Apart from the *crème de la crème* of the Oxbridge post-war graduates and distinguished professors, Murdoch also made significant acquaintances outside the university walls. During her stay in Brussels, where she went on behalf of UNRRA to work in camps for refugees,<sup>2</sup> she became familiar with existentialism. In 1945 she met in person the main figure of the movement, Jean-Paul Sartre. The importance of this meeting is evidenced by her first published book, which was on Sartre and was the first monograph in English to present Sartre's philosophy to a British audience.

The Bulgarian-born novelist and playwright Elias Canetti also played an important role in Murdoch's life. This Nobel Prize Laureate was a powerful source of influence who held Murdoch in his intellectual grip for almost three years from the time they met in 1952. Another important source of inspiration for Murdoch was Simone Weil, the French philosopher, Christian mystic and activist. In her book *Iris Murdoch, Gender and Philosophy*, Sabina Lovibond points out: "Beginning in the early 1950s, Iris Murdoch falls under the

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<sup>2</sup> UNRRA stands for United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. It was an international relief agency founded in 1943 in order to help the victims of war in the areas under the control of the United Nations.

influence of the French religious thinker Simone Weil (1909-43) and accepts from her certain ideas that will leave an indelible mark” (28).

After years of probing and analysing various concepts, Murdoch found philosophical thought which turned out to be resistant to the trial of time. Miles Leeson, following Peter Conradi, observes: “Platonism was the only philosophy which remained with Murdoch throughout her life, and which she never disowned or discarded [...] Platonism is never far from the surface of almost every novel discussed, it is in the competition with other, more contemporary philosophies” (2).

Murdoch’s choosing to develop a form of Platonism in the later twentieth century was to say the least unusual considering the prevalence of analytic and language philosophy in post-war Britain. David Tracy observes that “for many philosophers in the Continental tradition from Nietzsche through Heidegger to Deleuze, Plato is where the Greeks took a wrong turn – either away from the honest aesthetic world of tragedy (Nietzsche) or away from the non-forgetfulness of Being in the pre-Socratic world (Heidegger) or away from the more daring language studies of some of the Sophists (Deleuze)” (54). Among significant twentieth-century philosophers, Emmanuel Lévinas and Jean-Luc Marion in particular reread and rethought aspects of the Platonic heritage whilst critically retrieving it, but they remain in a minority.<sup>3</sup>

Her embracing of Plato, although surprising on account of its incongruence with the trends popular at that time, appears the most sensible option for Murdoch, because, as Heather Widdows observes in *The Moral Vision of Iris Murdoch*, “only in Plato could she find the varied picture of human being which she sought” (9).<sup>4</sup> Once embraced, Platonism remained for her a thought-provoking source of reflection, which she expressed in her philosophical essays and the interviews she gave. In an interview with W.K. Rose in 1968 Murdoch declared: ‘I once was kind of existentialist, and now I am a kind of Platonist [sic]. What I am concerned about really is love...’ (*Existentialists and Mystics* xxiv). In conversation with Bryan Magee, originally shown on British television in 1977, Murdoch also emphasized her devotion to Platonism stating that “Plato is not only the father of our philosophy; he is our

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<sup>3</sup> See Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity* (The Hague: Marinus Nijhoff, 1969) and Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991), pp. 215-217.

<sup>4</sup> Widdows points out that when Murdoch first encountered Plato as an undergraduate, she disliked him intensely: “Iris despised Plato, thinking him reactionary, dishonest, full of cheap dialectical tricks. Reading *The Republic* left her feeling aggressive [...] However, she gradually began to see Plato as the philosopher relevant to the modern age, owing to the similarity of the periods, both being times of ‘critical breakdown’” (9).



best philosopher. Of course, the methods of philosophy change, but we have not left Plato behind, which is also to say that philosophy does not make progress in the way that science does” (*Existentialists and Mystics* 6).

Plato thus holds a privileged position in the pantheon of prominent thinkers and theorists whose concepts Murdoch examined. He and his philosophy undoubtedly tower over the ideas unfolded in her own philosophical essays. From the 1970s essay, “The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts”, to her great work of 1992, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, Murdoch studied Plato scrupulously and incessantly. Between 1969 and 1986, she devoted several essays to reinterpretation of his concepts. “The Idea of Perfection” and “On ‘God’ and ‘Good’” revolve around the significance of Good in moral life, while in her subsequent essay, “The Fire and the Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artists”, and two dialogues, “Art and Eros: A Dialogue about Art” and “Above the Gods: A Dialogue about Religion”, Murdoch explored Plato’s understanding of art and engaged herself in debate on the validity of his claims.

Murdoch’s evident interest in Plato’s philosophy raises the question of its influence on her novels. Indeed, the correlation between literature and philosophy in her fictional as well as non-fictional writing has been the subject of many studies and constitutes a major trend in Murdoch scholarship, which recently witnesses a worldwide renaissance.<sup>5</sup>

In his timely study *Iris Murdoch: Philosophical Novelist* (2010) Miles Leeson observes that Murdoch responded to the philosophies of Sartre, Plato, Nietzsche and Heidegger not only in her philosophical writings, but also in her fiction. After analysing the philosophical phases of her life, Leeson argues that Murdoch’s narratives always rely on a strong metaphysical underpinning. His study, acknowledging the connection between Murdoch’s fiction and her philosophical ideas, points the direction for further exploration of the links between her philosophical ideas and her novels. Among scholars who like Leeson focus on the relationship between Murdoch’s fiction and her philosophical ideas one must

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<sup>5</sup> The recent international interest in Murdoch studies can be exemplified not only by a high number of publications but also by conferences and events focusing on her. In the last few years several conferences dedicated to Murdoch took place, among which we can mention the METU British Novelists Conference in Ankara, Turkey, which took Murdoch as its subject in 2008; a conference on Murdoch hosted in 2009 by the University of Porto in Portugal; the international conference on Iris Murdoch’s Philosophy at The Roma Tre University in Rome, held in February 2014; and the seventh international Iris Murdoch Conference held at Kingston University in September 2014. According to the information provided at the official website of Kingston University London, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, where Iris Murdoch Collections are kept, in the past two years over 1,300 items from the Murdoch archives have been issued to visitors for research or other purposes. In addition, one must also mention some of the events promoting Iris Murdoch’s legacy, like an exhibition on Murdoch in 2008-9 at the University of Barcelona; a talk by the journalist and broadcaster Bidisha, also run by the Royal Society of Literature at the National Portrait Gallery in 2012; or the BBC ‘Head to Head’ programme on freedom and determinism in the philosophy of Iris Murdoch and David Pears aired in August 2012.

mention Niklas Forsberg and his recent study *Language Lost and Found: On Iris Murdoch and the Limits of Philosophical Discourse* (2013). Dealing with the problem of conceptual loss as related to our use of language, Forsberg offers an exhaustive interpretation of Murdoch's philosophy and includes an analysis of one of her novels, *The Black Prince*. Another noteworthy study focusing on the relationship between Murdoch's moral philosophy and her fiction is Gillian Dooley's doctoral thesis, *Courage and Truthfulness: Ethical Strategies and the Creative Process in the Novels of Iris Murdoch, Doris Lessing and V.S. Naipaul* (2009), which compares the ethical problems identified by these novelists in the creative process of writing and describes the strategies they use to address these problems.<sup>6</sup>

The brief summary of the current state of research presented above indicates that the number of critical works discussing Murdoch's fiction in the light of her philosophical ideas is growing. However, one must admit that in spite of the unabated interest in the topic, the role of Platonic ideas in shaping Murdoch's novels, which is the subject of this study, has received little thorough examination. Plato's ideas have been perused in selected novels by Iris Murdoch in a number of scholarly articles: Elizabeth Dipple's "The Green Knight and Other Vagaries of the Spirit; or Tricks and Images for the Human Soul; or the Uses of Imaginative Literature" (1982), James Gindin's "Images of Illusion in the Work of Iris Murdoch" (1960), Martha Nussbaum's "Love and Vision: Iris Murdoch on Eros and the Individual" (1996), and David Tracy's "Iris Murdoch and the Many Faces of Platonism" (1996). Nevertheless, a detailed study focusing on Murdoch's fiction as a whole in terms of an artistic reworking of Plato's ideas has not been conducted yet. Leeson's book mentioned above discusses the role of Platonism in *The Bell* and a Wittgensteinian Neo-Platonism in *The Green Knight* but the wide scope of his research prevents him from considering a greater number of Murdoch's novels. An excellent study elucidating Murdoch's interest in Plato was also conducted by Peter Conradi in *The Saint and the Artist*, his first book-length study of Murdoch's fiction. In this probably best and most comprehensive examination of Murdoch's fiction, including a preface by the renowned critic and Murdoch's husband John Bayley,

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<sup>6</sup> In yet another study which explores interconnections between Murdoch's fiction and her philosophical writing, *The Mystic Way in Postmodernity: Transcending Theological Boundaries in the Writings of Iris Murdoch, Denise Levertov and Annie Dillard* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2009), Sue Yore engages in an interdisciplinary dialogue between literature, mysticism and theology and discusses, among other things, the use of literature for theological expression in Murdoch's writings. Also, Diana Philips in her *Agencies of the Good in the Work of Iris Murdoch* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1991) presents Murdoch's concept of Man and her views on the Good as originating in her fiction and formulated in her philosophical work. The book gives special attention to the influence of Plato, J.P. Sartre, Simone Weil, Gabriel Marcel, and language philosophers on Murdoch and examines, in part two, five of Murdoch's novels in greater depth.

Conradi describes some of the Platonic influences on her novels, such as the role of Eros in *A Severed Head* and *The Black Prince*, but these observations constitute only a small part of this elucidating study.

A study focusing solely on the influence of Plato on Murdoch's own ideas is Sonja Zuba's *Iris Murdoch's Contemporary Retrieval of Plato*. Zuba, who obtained her Ph.D. in Philosophy from the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium, focuses on three major areas of correlation, namely, between Art and Philosophy, Philosophy and Metaphysics, and Philosophy and Religion, arguing that Murdoch's literary works are largely an imaginative expression of her philosophy. Zuba concentrates on Murdoch's moral philosophy, in particular on the relation of the self and the Good as echoing Platonic ethics, and addresses the relation between metaphysics and ethics in Murdoch's thought, presenting also Murdoch's engagement with the importance of art for philosophy. Although Zuba's study provides an excellent insight into Murdoch's retrieval of Plato's thought, it gives little attention to Murdoch's novels and the artistic means of inscribing Plato's ideas into her narratives. Zuba refrains from a comprehensive analysis of Murdoch's fiction and discusses more systematically only *The Bell*, treating it as representative of Murdoch's literary output (it is noteworthy that this particular novel was previously discussed in Platonic terms by Conradi in *The Saint and the Artist*<sup>7</sup>). Moreover, although Zuba's study focuses on the correlation of philosophy and literature and reveals the extent of Murdoch's interest in Plato's ideas, it lacks any extensive analysis of Murdoch's fiction as reflecting this interest. Relying on Elizabeth's Dipple's *Iris Murdoch: Work for Spirit* and Deborah Johnson's *Iris Murdoch*, Zuba vaguely enumerates the points of convergence between Plato's dialogues and Murdoch's fiction: the "sharply focused detail of the settings, the moments of interaction [that] become extremely tense between the characters, the frequent surprises, intellectual and emotional, the play between the ideas and arguments themselves with the self's mixture of understanding and egoistic self-delusion" (85). She adds that, "like Plato's aporetic dialogues, [Murdoch's novels] tend not to reach closure but to dissolve or sometimes explode or implode as the truth at stake becomes both unavoidable and unbearable, both undeniable and unavailable" (85). As much as the classic strengths of Platonic dialogues mentioned by Zuba may be an apt

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<sup>7</sup> Conradi points out that "the scenery of *The Bell* is borrowed from *Phaedo*" (*The Saint and the Artist* 147). He also points out that the aerial map of Imber Court is "a Platonic map of deselfing" (*The Saint and the Artist* 147) and discusses the concept of Eros which requires purification. In her study of *The Bell* Zuba likewise focuses on the theme of love as transcending the physical, with the human moving into the realm of the spiritual, and on the role of imagination in the process of purifying love.

observation, they are not followed by any examples or, more importantly, any illustration of the way in which Plato's thought is transferred into the novel medium.

The present argument is designed to explore systematically and demonstrate how certain principal Platonic motifs and ideas translate into the construction and nourish the content of Iris Murdoch's novels. Focus is laid on the interconnections between the disciplines of philosophy and literature, as the thesis investigates the ways in which Murdoch retrieves and modifies some of Plato's philosophical ideas through the medium of the novel and how her novels parallel Plato's dialogues. It is assumed that the latter not only comprise philosophical ideas, which so far have been amply accounted for, but also testify to Plato's great literary talent. From his dialogues, therefore, we draw here a picture of Plato not only as a philosopher, but also a writer struggling to express his ideas through the medium of the dialogue, a teacher very much concerned with the critical abilities of his followers, and finally, a cultural critic capable of discerning the positive and the negative influences of various cultural products and practices. Plato, one of the most influential ancient philosophers, is thus approached here as an artistically gifted intellectual, who was actively shaping the philosophical debate of his time and still remains a great source of influence. The thesis seeks to explore the depth of Murdoch's engagement with Plato, in particular the artistic means of translating his ideas into her novels. In addition, it is estimated that the thesis will deepen our understanding of Plato's philosophical thought, as seen here through the prism of Murdoch's reflection on and imaginative reworking of his dialogues.

Taking into consideration the fact that this thesis is concerned with tracing the echoes of Plato's philosophical thought in Murdoch's novels, it is of the uttermost importance to designate the texts from which Plato's ideas are derived. It must be emphasized that in order to select the dialogues most representative for Plato's ideas, certain strategic decisions have been made. It has been taken into consideration that the exact number of dialogues written by Plato and the original sequence of the dialogues remain unknown.

Thirty-six dialogues and thirteen letters have been ascribed to Plato, although scholars still argue about the authorship of approximately eighteen of them. Furthermore, roughly speaking since the early nineteenth century, the academic world is divided into two groups as far as the order of the dialogues is concerned, between those favouring a Unitarian, and those advocating a developmental view of Plato's texts. The Unitarian view, going back to Schleiermacher, tends to assume that Plato's dialogues are composed from a single point of

view and should therefore be explained on literary and pedagogical grounds, rather than as denoting a change in the author's philosophy. The developmental tendency, on the other hand, introduced by Karl Friedrich Hermann, assumes that Plato developed as a philosopher and changed his mind during the course of his life and, consequently, the diversity of the dialogues reflects different stages in the evolution of his thought.

For the purpose of the argument conducted in this thesis I have chosen to analyse in detail *The Seventh Letter*, *The Republic*, *Gorgias*, *Protagoras* and *Phaedrus*, the authorship of which has not been questioned. As I have not been trained in Ancient Greek, I have relied on the English translations of the classic works by Plato by Benjamin Jowett, a renowned theologian and translator of Plato and Thucydides educated at the University of Oxford, and by Walter Hamilton, an English scholar, educated at Trinity College, Cambridge and well-known for his translations of Ammianus Marcellinus's *The Later Roman Empire* as well as Plato's *Symposium*, *Gorgias*, *Phaedrus* and *Letters VII and VIII*. In my analysis, I follow the order of dialogues proposed by Charles Kahn, who displays a Unitarian view, because Kahn's careful analysis, focused on both Plato's thought and the nuances of his literary style, acknowledges the coexistence of the two aspects of Plato's intellectual activity, and for this reason has been chosen as the focal point of reference for my own deliberations.<sup>8</sup>

The novels of Iris Murdoch analysed in this thesis have been carefully selected to represent different periods in her career. *Under the Net* (1954) and *The Flight from the Enchanter* (1956) are included as examples of her early work, which revolves around her critique of existentialism and of language as a cognitive tool. Recognized as displaying the influence of the French and the Irish models manifest, respectively, in the writing of Raymond Queneau and Samuel Beckett, these novels will be surveyed in terms of the presence of Platonic thought. From the period 1961-66, during which Murdoch's novels provoked a wave of criticism attacking their stylistic mannerisms, decadent morals and discord between her theoretical precepts and practice, I have selected for analysis *A Severed Head* (1961), *An Unofficial Rose* (1962) and *The Time of the Angels* (1966). In addition, *The Unicorn* (1963) and *The Italian Girl* (1964) have been chosen as representatives of her Gothic novels, devoid of the humorous element otherwise common in her fiction. *The Nice and the Good* (1968) and *Bruno's Dream* (1969), which changed the reception of and a general critical

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<sup>8</sup> The order of the dialogues as suggested by Kahn is as follows: Group I (*Apology*, *Crito*, *Ion*, *Hippias Minor*, *Gorgias*, *Menexenus*, *Laches*, *Charmides*, *Euthyphro*, *Protagoras*, *Meno*, *Lysias*, *Euthydemus*, *Symposium*, *Phaedo*, *Cratylus*); Group II (*Republic*, *Phaedrus*, *Parmenides*, *Theaetetus*); Group III (*Sophist*, *Statesman*, *Philebus*, *Timaeus*, *Critas*, *Laws*).

attitude to Murdoch's writing to a more positive position, have been chosen to mark the period of her artistic maturity, which she reached in the late sixties. Published in the seventies, *The Black Prince* (1973), *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* (1974) and *The Sea, the Sea* (1978) are novels of the so-called prime period, in which Murdoch mastered the novel form to such an extent that she enjoyed substantial critical acclaim and won the Booker Prize. In the eighties and the early nineties, she published seven extensive novels. I have chosen to analyse *The Philosopher's Pupil* (1983), *The Good Apprentice* (1985), *The Book and the Brotherhood* (1987), and *The Green Knight* (1993). More complex and darker in tone, her late 'baggy monster' novels posed a considerable challenge to reviewers, who often emphasize the multi-dimensionality and complexity of these works.<sup>9</sup> Finally, in order to trace the influence of Plato's philosophical thought, I will refer to *Jackson's Dilemma* (1995), Murdoch's last published novel written during the period in which she struggled with the devastating disease.

A methodological problem which must be addressed here is the nature of the relationship between Murdoch's novels and her philosophical texts. Murdoch's legacy, rooted in two different disciplines, has left critics with the dilemma of how to approach her works and how to navigate between the two fields. Analysis of her novels, which stand as intriguing testimonies to her intellect and insight, remains a daring task and continues to provoke critical disagreement.<sup>10</sup>

For some critics, the presence of philosophical subject-matter in Murdoch's fiction should be included in the categorisation of her novels. The question of whether her novels should be classified as 'philosophical' has generated extremely diversified responses over the years and indicates how deeply the reception of Murdoch's fictional writings remains influenced by the existence of her non-fictional writings. As long ago as 1968 Guy Backus argued the case in *Iris Murdoch: The Novelist as Philosopher, the Philosopher as Novelist* for classifying Murdoch as a philosophical novelist. He suggests that Murdoch is more a philosopher than she is a novelist and that fiction is a medium used by her to express philosophical ideas.<sup>11</sup> Leeson also argues that, especially in her early fiction, "a significant amount of space was

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<sup>9</sup> See for instance Richard Eder's review, "A Druid Among the Dons: *The Book and the Brotherhood* by Iris Murdoch", published in *Los Angeles Times* in 1988, and Harold Bloom's "Comedy of Worldly Salvation", published in *The New York Times* in 1986.

<sup>10</sup> On the relation between literature and philosophy in Murdoch's writing see also Maria Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human: The Moral Thought of Iris Murdoch*. (Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 20 and Niklas Forsberg, *Language Lost and Found: On Iris Murdoch and Limits of Philosophical Discourse* (Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2013), pp.15-53.

<sup>11</sup> This notion was first developed by Peter Wolfe in *The Disciplined Heart: Iris Murdoch and her Novels*. Wolfe was the first to suggest that in order for critics to understand Murdoch's fiction they must have a clear understanding of her philosophy.

allowed for the discussion and ramification of the sorts of questions usually reserved for the development in philosophical text [...]” (4). Therefore, he argues that “the impact of a range of philosophers, and the writing of her own philosophical works, moved her narrative into this area” (Leeson 4).

At the other end of the critical spectrum are those scholars who follow in the footsteps of Murdoch’s official biographer, Peter Conradi, and argue for the autonomy of her literary works, resenting any attempts to introduce a new terminology.<sup>12</sup> Donna Gerstenberger, another scholar who takes a stance in favour of interpreting Murdoch’s fictional works as existing independently from her moral philosophy, states that “although some of Murdoch’s ideas may be formally philosophical in origin, she is not primarily a philosophical novelist. Nor are her novels merely experimental formulations of her critical hypotheses, as some critics seem to expect them to be, although the novels do show a certain consonance with her ideas about what a novel ought to be like” (15).

Of crucial importance to this debate and taken into consideration in this thesis is Murdoch’s own stance on the correlation between philosophy and fiction as expressed in her explicit understanding of the term ‘philosophical novel’. In her criticism of Sartre’s *La Nauseé* Murdoch states: “I can think of one good philosophical novel which I admire very much, Sartre’s *La Nausée*. That does manage to express some interesting ideas about contingency and consciousness, and to remain a work of art, which does not have to be read in the light of theories which the author has expressed elsewhere” (*Existentialists and Mystics* 20). This statement reveals that Murdoch clearly emphasizes the distinction between two types of discourse which do not have to converge. Additionally, her scepticism towards reading novels exclusively in terms of the author’s ideas as expressed outside the works in question was articulated in an interview with Jack I. Biles given in 1977. Opposing the labelling of her own novels as ‘philosophical’ and arguing against the charge of an intentional incorporation of philosophical content, Murdoch explains: “I don’t want philosophy, as such, to intrude into the novel world at all and I think it doesn’t. I find really no difficulty in separating these activities. I mention philosophy sometimes in the novels because I happen to

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<sup>12</sup> In *The Saint and the Artist* Peter Conradi suggests that instead of the term ‘philosophical novelist’, Murdoch deserves to be known rather as a ‘moral psychologist’ because the term does not generalize and simplify the variety of ideas with which she engages into a dialogue (xiv, 94). It is worth emphasizing that Murdoch herself coined and claimed the term ‘moral psychologist’ at the conference in Caen in 1978.

know about it, just as another writer may know about coal mining; it happens to come in” (Biles 58).<sup>13</sup>

It seems that Murdoch not only insisted on a clear distinction between philosophy and literature, but also believed that she avoided introducing any philosophical concepts into her fiction, which appears at least confusing considering their unquestionable presence in her novels. Talking to Bryan Magee, Murdoch insisted:

I feel in myself such an absolute horror of putting theories or ‘philosophical ideas’ as such into my novels. I might put in things about philosophy, because I happen to know about philosophy. If I knew about sailing ships I would put in sailing ships; and in a way, as a novelist, I would rather know about sailing ships than about philosophy. Of course novelists and poets *think*, and great ones think supremely well. (quoted in *Existentialists and Mystics* 20)

However, both the critics who present arguments in favour of classifying her novels as philosophical and those who avoid any terminology that signifies the synergy between philosophy and literature all give weight to the fact that during her lifetime Murdoch expressed various ideas concerning the nature of fiction, which were often mutually exclusive, the statement quoted above being a case in point. Leeson believes that “one thing is clear: Murdoch is consistently inconsistent in her approach to fiction, being paradoxical, ambiguous, ambivalent and indeterminate” (12).

One may assume that the reason for Murdoch’s rejection of the terminology lies with her acute awareness of the disparate nature of the media she used because, according to Murdoch, in the discourse of the novel, philosophical thought undergoes a transformation and loses the quality it displays within philosophical discourse. Murdoch is ready to admit that there is a place for philosophical ideas within the structure of the novel, but at the same time she emphasizes that the purpose of the novel is not necessarily limited to being the platform for voicing philosophical ideas:

I think as soon as philosophy gets into a work of literature it becomes a plaything of the writer, and rightly so. There is no strictness about ideas and argument, the rules are different and truth is differently conveyed. If it is a good art the ideas are either transformed or else appear as little chunks of reflection which are put up with cheerfully for the sake of the rest of the work. (*Existentialists and Mystics* 19)

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<sup>13</sup> For more details see the full interview. Jack. I. Biles, "An Interview with Iris Murdoch, 1978", ed. Gillian Dooley. *From a Tiny Corner in the House of Fiction: Conversations with Iris Murdoch*, (University of South Carolina Press, 2003).



At this point, it must be explained that in this thesis I do not claim that Murdoch's fiction should be considered a direct realization of the arguments presented in her philosophical texts. I assume, rather, that the ideas inscribed in her novels form an autonomous artistic expression and extension of the debate started in her philosophical essays. Murdoch's essays and her fiction are here seen as connected, chiefly on the plane of ideas they convey in their own ways, and this connection will be examined as being a significantly elucidatory material for reflection, not as a universal key guaranteeing an error-free interpretation of her novels.

My approach to Murdoch's *oeuvre* is thus characterized by the conviction that drawing a clear line between her novels and her philosophical ideas, or her novels and her literary theory, would not be an adequate and rewarding assumption. On the contrary, I acknowledge the existence of interconnections between her philosophical thought, literary theory and fiction. Her novels, an innovative and creative legacy, the nature of which challenges traditional terminology, are influenced by Murdoch's diversified interests, so I agree with Sonja Zuba who, in *Iris Murdoch's Contemporary Retrieval of Plato*, presents the following approach: "We argue that her literary theory in the end comes to look very much like an extension of her moral philosophy. At the same time, it is important to recognize that Murdoch herself makes this resemblance explicit" (15).

I do not aim to solve the problem of nomenclature of Murdoch's novels raised on account of her philosophical competence and interests, nor do I try to explain the degree to which her philosophy is present in her fiction, and vice versa. I admit that the problematic relationship between literature and philosophy in Murdoch's fiction remains an interesting task, but I would like to emphasize that solving this problem does not lie within the scope of this thesis. My sole interest lies in acknowledging and tracing the echoes of Plato's philosophical thought in her fiction, which, I presume, should also be linked with the ideas expressed by Murdoch in her other writings.

My understanding is similar to that expressed by Martha Nussbaum, who thinks that Murdoch's novels are "rightly seen as meditations on human love and virtue, in which the complex intelligence of the author, at once both sceptical and loving towards her characters, illuminates the structure of the whole in a way that invites the reader to look for connections with the more overtly meditative texts" (137). I consider Murdoch's philosophical essays and her novels as representative of two distinctive genres and of two disciplines, which on account of her vibrant intellectual life are interconnected. Her novels and philosophical essays are

therefore treated here as autonomous kinds of texts which rely on different means of expression, but it will also be assumed that both of these strains of Murdoch's writing are permeated by her recurring and consistent interest in Plato's philosophy so that they can be seen as supplementing and informing each other.

Therefore, I include in this thesis numerous quotations from Murdoch's philosophical texts. Additionally, to enrich and support my arguments, I have also researched and refer to books owned and kept by Murdoch in her library, including her original copies of Plato's writings as well as the critical works on Plato she read, and quote passages she underlined or commented upon. The passages thus introduced in this thesis preserve Murdoch's original underlining and constitute an invaluable source of information on her approach towards the quoted material, testifying to her engagement with Plato's dialogues as a reader and providing elucidating material for the analysis of her novels.<sup>14</sup>

In brief, while Murdoch's novels are the quintessential object of my interest, and the presented research focuses chiefly on the novels, her philosophical and critical texts are also taken into consideration. In general, the philosophical essays and literary criticism published by Murdoch, and the interviews given by her, are treated as the context within which the novels and their parts are placed in this thesis.

The solution I adopt is also indebted to the insight made by Maria Jędrzejkiewicz in *Perspektywa etyczna*, where Jędrzejkiewicz argues that the philosophical content of Murdoch's novels should be classified as 'reflections'. She shares Murdoch's conviction that reflections or musings of a philosophical nature, traceable in her fiction, differ significantly from the proper philosophical deliberations inscribed in her philosophical essays. Jędrzejkiewicz points out that ideas appearing in the literary works do not have the rigor of philosophical arguments, and they do not aim to bring solutions to philosophical problems. In addition, Jędrzejkiewicz observes that reflections, apart from their less strict, 'non-intellectually binding' character, are inscribed into the complex, multi-faceted whole of a narrative (*Perspektywa etyczna* 14). She presumes that philosophical thought proper needs to be part of philosophical discourse as the process leading to the purification and crystallization

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<sup>14</sup> Murdoch's books are currently kept at Kingston University, which has a long-term research interest in Iris Murdoch and holds extensive archives of her private libraries, her books, letters, publications, and other smaller related archives and materials. Kingston University Press publishes the *Iris Murdoch Review* and is also the home of the Iris Murdoch Society, which has a world-wide membership. Biennial international conferences on Murdoch have been held at Kingston University since 2002.

of an idea stands in direct opposition to the open-ended discourse of a literary work. In the novel the process is reversed.

The approaches taken by Nussbaum and Jędrzejkiewicz represent the so-called ethical turn in literary studies, dating back to the late 1990s and re-establishing literature as a fundamental mode of moral inquiry. The ethical turn in literary studies corresponds with the literary turn in contemporary, especially Anglo-American philosophy following Rorty, and has been concisely characterized as “a homologous response to the putative formalism of analytical moral theory in favour of more Aristotelian – *eudaimonistic* and *aretaic* – approach to human existence as it is played out by singular persons in specific situations, which are, so the claim goes, best illuminated in and through works of literature” (xliii).<sup>15</sup>

The upsurge of interest in the relationship between ethics, literature, criticism, and theory, the kind of ethical turn that has been adopted also for the purposes of this thesis, can be supported and justified by Murdoch’s own views.<sup>16</sup> Murdoch’s views have inspired a great number of contemporary thinkers, including philosophers (Maria Antonaccio, Cora Diamond, Jim Corder, Raimond Gaita, Steven Mulhall, Martha Nussbaum, Charles Taylor) and theologians (Don Cupitt, Franklin Gamwell, William Schweiker, David Tracy). Peter Conradi explains Murdoch’s continuing appeal by pointing out that her writing “helped restore moral philosophy to the people, showing its importance as something other than a remote, enclosed speciality, an arcane ritual conducted by an elite within the academy” (*Iris Murdoch: A Life* 587). Murdoch, as a philosopher, but more importantly as a writer, incessantly insisted on the facticity and sovereignty of values, claiming that literature, a capacious and universal medium, is more capable of conveying abstract philosophical concepts than a philosophical treatise.<sup>17</sup> Eloquently expressed both in her philosophical essays and her novels, the claim that moral growth is both desirable and attainable for human beings paved the way for the ‘ethical turn’ in literary criticism and is the reason why her legacy continues to underwrite it.

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<sup>15</sup> *Eudaimonism* is an ethical theory which maintains that happiness (*eudaimonia*) is reached through virtue (*arête*). The quotation comes from: Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Hemel Hempstead, 1981) p. xliii.

<sup>16</sup> See *Renegotiating Ethics in Literature, Philosophy and Theory*, ed. by Jane Adamson, Richard Freadman and David Parker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); *Iris Murdoch and Morality*, ed. by Anne Rowe and Avril Horner (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Frances White, “‘Art is for life’s sake ... or else it is worthless’: the Innovative Influence of Iris Murdoch”, *Iris Murdoch and Her Work: Critical Essays*, ed. by Mustafa Kırca and Şule Okuroğlu (Stuttgart: Ibidem Verlag, 2010).

<sup>17</sup> See “The Fire and the Sun” in which Murdoch suggests that literature can illustrate the struggles of moral life which philosophy, at best, merely alludes to in its systematic explanations.

Always aware of the reader as the partner in the enterprise of novel-writing, Murdoch sees “the creation and appreciation of a novel [as] a complex highly diversified operation” (*Metaphysics as a Guide to Moral* 146) and perceives reading novels as both a moral and spiritual activity: “The consumption of literature involves continual (usually instinctive) evaluation” (*Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* 190). In Murdoch’s understanding literature is a potent vehicle for putting ethical theories into praxis. Therefore, she vehemently rejects the assumption that the literary text is a self-contained artefact, relating to nothing outside itself. She replaces that assumption with the emphasis on the agency of both the author and the reader and brings them to a position of responsibility towards the text. In line with theorists like Martha Nussbaum or Michael Eskin, who treat the author-reader relationship in ethical terms, Murdoch’s legacy continues a long tradition dating back to Plato, the tradition of approaching literature as a site of moral import.<sup>18</sup>

To bring this introduction to a close, I provide an outline of the following argument. In the first chapter it will be argued that Murdoch’s appreciation for Plato’s philosophical thought is mirrored in her novels through her use of imagery. Plato’s Allegory of the Cave will be presented as a model capturing the essence of a complicated relation between the *self* and the outside world. The chapter focuses on the images in Murdoch’s fiction which reproduce the circumstances of the prisoners dwelling in the Cave as described by Plato, especially the state of *eikasia*, the immersion in illusion, and analyses Murdoch’s use of images to convey the process of discarding the state of illusion. Murdoch’s use of metaphorical images will also be presented as a narrative strategy converging with Plato’s didactic use of figurative language and, on the other hand, preceding the cognitive turn in metaphor studies heralded by Lakoff’s theory.

In the second chapter I propose to analyse the dialogical exchanges of ideas between characters in Murdoch’s novels as reflecting the philosophical debates taking place in her time and evoking the ancient tradition of dialectics. The participants in such communication as depicted by Murdoch, the circumstances in which it takes place, and finally the content of the conversations will be evaluated as echoing the narrative situations in Plato’s dialogues. I will argue that apart from retrieving Plato’s philosophical thought, Murdoch utilizes and reinterprets the generic form of dialogue. Murdoch’s rediscovery of Plato’s dialectics and the Socratic dialogue will be discussed as an innovative solution to the problem of

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<sup>18</sup> See Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1986), Martha Nussbaum, *Love’s Knowledge: Essays in Philosophy and Literature* (New York and Oxford, 1990) and Michael Eskin, “Introduction to the Double ‘Turn’ to Ethics and Literature?”, *Poetics Today*, 25.4 (Winter 2004), pp. 557-572.

miscommunication diagnosed by her as affecting Western civilization so heavily influenced by the tradition of solipsistic philosophical movements like existentialism.

The third chapter describes the influence of cultural heritage on the outlook of Murdoch's characters. It discusses how non-physical aspects of culture such as ideas inscribed in philosophical and literary texts affect her characters' actions; in particular, it will be argued that Murdoch's depiction of her characters' responses to various texts establishes a meaningful connection between the characters' actions and the texts they find inspiring. It will be contended that Murdoch's deployment of various genres and literary allusions to render such a connection echoes Plato's ideas concerning the influence of cultural heritage. Plato's cautious treatment of poetry as inviting emulation will be traced in Murdoch's description of characters inspired by various models of behaviour derived from literature. Finally, this chapter gives insight into Murdoch's evaluation of some literary traditions and locates her ideas pertaining to the influence of reading in the field of contemporary cognitive studies, showing the compatibility of her artistic vision of universal human nature with the recent developments in this field, which positions Murdoch as a novelist and thinker ahead of her times and illustrates the significance of her work.

# Chapter I

## Plato's Allegory of the Cave and Murdoch's Imagery

In this chapter it will be argued that Murdoch's appreciation for Plato's philosophical thought is mirrored in her novels through the use of imagery. Plato's Allegory of the Cave will be presented as a model capturing the essence of the self's complicated relation to the outside world in Murdoch's fiction. The chapter focuses on images that mirror the circumstances of the prisoners described by Plato. Murdoch's descriptions of various enclosed spaces will be presented as alluding to the Platonic Cave. Plato's depiction of the state of *eikasia*, conditioned by reliance on sensory data and connected to the prisoners' limited understanding, will be discussed as being echoed in Murdoch's novels. It will be argued that in her portrayal of contemporary cavemen, she attempts to recreate the state through images illustrating the malfunctions in her characters' vision, and employs the sun and fire imagery to signal and comment on the changes taking place in their outlook. Special attention will be given to the concept of Eros and its role in awakening the prisoners from their illusory dream. The images of violence and the characters that embody the ambiguous spiritual energy of Eros will be presented as crucial elements of Murdoch's depiction of spiritual development. Finally, the chapter discusses Murdoch's stance on the possibility of leaving the Cave of illusions. The paradox present in Murdoch's fiction and stemming from the prerogative to destroy false images and the human inability to reject them completely will be depicted as a peculiar form of realistic compromise advocated by Murdoch. The last section of the chapter will be devoted to Murdoch's use of metaphorical images, a narrative strategy which will be presented as converging with Plato's didactic use of figurative language.

### I.1 The interpretation of the Allegory of the Cave in Murdoch's philosophical essays

Plato's Allegory of the Cave is a part of *The Republic*, a Socratic dialogue written around 380 BC. Appearing at the beginning of Book VII, it is presented after the Metaphor of the Sun and the Analogy of the Divided Line. The Allegory of the Cave describes a group of prisoners dwelling in a cave. They spend their lives staring at the wall and mistake the shadows displayed on the wall for the actual things. When one of the prisoners is forced to turn his head, he experiences a shock of seeing the firelight for the first time. The light of the fire hurts his eyes, so he wants to return to the previous state, but before he retreats into darkness, he is forced to go even further and get outside the cave. After his departure from the cave he is

given a chance to experience the world outside. Initially he sees only the reflections of people and things in water, but with his sight gradually improving, he is eventually able to look at the night sky and upon the sun itself. The freed prisoner gains knowledge about the reality which turns him into a philosopher. He realizes that the world outside the cave is superior, so he returns to the cave in order to share the knowledge with his former fellow-prisoners. Knowing the world only through the prism of shadows, the prisoners welcome him with hostility, are suspicious of the ideas proclaimed by the freed prisoner and show unwillingness to follow his footsteps.

Being an iconic text of Western philosophy, *The Republic*, and consequently, the Allegory of the Cave, has been the subject of numerous scholarly inquiries. To understand Murdoch's interpretation of the Allegory and to place it into a context, a short overview of more recent studies of this dialogue is required. Therefore, let me begin by briefly discussing some of the interpretations of *The Republic* that have shaped the debate up to now.

Unremitting interest in Plato's thought results in many diversified approaches to his text, among which we can distinguish studies focusing mostly on its political message and those interpreting the text from an epistemological point of view. The first group may be represented by Karl Popper's 1945 book *The Open Society and Its Enemies* in which Popper enumerates totalitarian features of Plato's city. The existence of a government not elected by its citizens or the development of the state dictated by the interests of the ruling class are, among others, the elements of Plato's vision considered by Popper as the tools of a highly oppressive apparatus. Aimed at autarky and advocating censorship, Plato's philosophical ideas are viewed as guidelines for totalitarian policy.

Apart from the interpretations opting for a political reading, scholars like Allan Bloom ask readers to consider the possibility that Plato was not creating a blueprint for an ideal city, but a learning exercise for young men. He claims that *The Republic* should rather be interpreted as a learning exercise.<sup>19</sup> Julia Annas, one of the most eminent scholars specializing in Plato, also opts for an explanation more harmonious with Plato's philosophical and educational objectives. In her study of Plato's philosophy and works, *Platonic Ethics, Old and New*, Annas adheres to the premise that the entire political structure of *The Republic* exists to

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<sup>19</sup> See Allan Bloom, *The Republic of Plato*. (New York: Basic, 1968).

serve as an analogy for the individual soul, in which various potentially competing or conflicting members might be integrated and orchestrated under a just and productive government.

Douglas Soccio, a contemporary scholar specializing in philosophy, argues that Plato's Allegory may be interpreted as a journey from the world of senses to the exploration of the Forms which constitute the highest and most fundamental type of reality. Plato's Allegory is viewed by Soccio as a presentation of levels of cognition, which the seeker of knowledge must achieve during the process of 'leaving the Cave'. In his book *Archetypes of Wisdom: An Introduction to Philosophy* Soccio argues that the Allegory of the Cave describes an ordeal necessary for the soul's ascent from a shadowy illusion to enlightenment, from mere opinion to the informed opinion, from rationally based knowledge to wisdom:

Those chained to the wall of shadows are imprisoned in the shadowy world of imagination and illusion (D); those loose within the cave occupy the "common sense" world of perception and informed opinion (C); those struggling through the passageway to the surface are acquiring knowledge through reason (B); the rich surface world of warmth and sunlight is the highest level of reality directly grasped by pure intelligence (A). (143)

According to Soccio, Plato describes four levels of awareness. In Soccio's study the levels are named after first letters of the alphabet, accordingly A, B, C and D. The lowest level of awareness (level D) is described as the level of illusion. Virtually no one inhabits this level all the time, but we can occasionally slip into this state, for instance, when we go to movies, which are just spectacles of light and sound, creating the illusion of depth and action. We can also slip into illusion without being aware of it when we hold opinions based solely on appearances, unanalyzed impressions, uncritically inherited beliefs, and unevaluated emotions.<sup>20</sup> Level C represents the second or informed level of awareness. It involves a wider range of opinions about what most of us probably think of as reality. Level C opinions are based on observations and perceptions of physical objects, not just photos or representations of them, so the opinions and conclusions of the object are of more substance. At this informed

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<sup>20</sup> Plato's description of this level coincides with the ideas presented by Heraclitus. The Heraclitean world of senses was the world of shadows, of ever-changing perceptions and customs. Therefore, Plato's portrayal of this state may be perceived as a critique of Heraclitean reasoning. In *Heraclitus and Derrida: Presocratic Deconstruction* Erin O'Connel observes that: "Plato viewed Heraclitus as the theorist of universal flux, contrasting him with Parmenides, who asserted a fixed and stable reality" (6). According to Plato, the very essence of knowledge is unchanging, therefore whatever is relative and always changing cannot be true, only what is eternal is real, what changes is only appearance. Consequently, we can have knowledge of what is eternal, of appearances there can only be opinions.



level, we realize that the way things appear may not be the way they are. In search of a pattern, we move beyond the world of sheer phenomenal images, fleeting and insubstantial, from a two-dimensional world of flickering shadows and reflections to a three-dimensional world of physical reality. The next level of awareness, namely the level B, takes us out of the realm of opinion into the world of *being*. At this stage knowledge is acquired through deductive reasoning. The laws of physics or mathematical rules are the results of the mind's access to this level. Finally, the highest level of reality is defined as a state in which the soul apprehends the absolute Form of the Good directly. The higher Forms are understood, apprehended, 'glimpsed', without any mediating process or principle. Soccio defines Platonic Forms in the following way: "Forms are universal types or kinds that somehow exist outside of space and time. The physical world contains particular *instances* of the various universal Forms. Today we may call Forms abstract objects" (134). Only knowledge of the Forms constitutes real knowledge, so it is considered superior to knowledge of the material world gained through the senses. In Plato's metaphysics, Forms are timeless essences or entities constituting the transcendental level of *being*, above and beyond our ordinary existence.

Murdoch's interpretation of Plato's Allegory is mostly embedded in her two works, "The Fire and the Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artists", written in 1976 and based upon the Romanes Lectures, and "The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts" first delivered as the Leslie Stephen Lecture in 1967. The most extensive analysis of the Allegory can be found in the first book, in which Murdoch states: "Plato pictures human life as a pilgrimage from appearance to reality" ("The Fire and the Sun" 387). This statement clearly embraces the reading of the Allegory as a model for a spiritual development rather than a utopian political scheme. In the same essay Murdoch focuses on the differences between various degrees of awareness discussed by Plato and emphasizes that they correlate with given parts of the soul. Murdoch illustrates the correspondence in the following way:

The pilgrim is thus seen as passing through different states of awareness whereby the higher reality is studied first in the form of shadows and images. These levels of awareness have (perhaps: Plato is not prepared to be too clear on this, 533 E, 534 A) objects with different degrees of reality; and to these awarenesses, each with its characteristic mode of desire, correspond different parts of the soul. The lowest part of the soul is egoistic, irrational, and deluded, the central part is aggressive and ambitious; the highest part is rational and good and knows the truth which lies beyond all images and hypotheses. ("The Fire and the Sun" 389)

As is evident from this passage, Murdoch distinguishes three main levels of awareness and she describes each level as having certain characteristics. Spiritual development is presented as a three-step transformation from being self-centred and deluded, to becoming more aspiring and single-minded, and finally to reaching the point at which one is able to see through the false images and become good.

In the same essay, Murdoch displays a rather pessimistic view on the potential human capacity for reaching the highest level of awareness. She believes that the ascent is usually unachievable for an average bread-eater, who rarely meets the high standards of spiritual progress. According to Murdoch, we leave our comfortable caves only occasionally, because the selfish psyche holds us firmly in its hypnotizing embraces: “That human beings are naturally selfish seems true on the evidence, whenever and wherever we look at them, in spite of a very small number of apparent exceptions. [...] The psyche is a historically determined individual relentlessly looking after itself” (“The Fire and the Sun” 364).

To overcome our natural tendency, some reorientation or simply the cleansing of desire is needed. Murdoch observes that Plato devotes much attention to transformative energy, a mediative spirit he calls Eros. In “The Fire and the Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artists” Eros is presented, along with Art and Beauty, as a great catalyst of change, and the means of spiritual progress:

This Eros, who is lover not beloved, is the ambiguous spiritual mediator and moving spirit of mankind. Eros is the desire for good and joy which is active at all levels in the soul and through which we are able to turn toward reality. This is the fundamental force which can release the prisoners and draw them toward the higher satisfactions of light and freedom. (“The Fire and the Sun” 415)

The role of Eros as a transformative energy facilitating the transition from one state of awareness to the other is also discussed by Murdoch in her own Socratic dialogues, “Art and Eros: A Dialogue about Art” (*Existentialists and Mystics* 464-95) and “Above the Gods” (*Existentialists and Mystics* 496-531). Neither good nor bad, Eros is characterized as an utterly ambiguous force, which can precipitate the prisoner out of her or his current state and initiate the change that is required for transformation.

Murdoch’s embracing of Plato’s Allegory, as expressed in her philosophical essays, allows us to deduce that, according to her, the Allegory constitutes a model which describes accurately the nature of the human condition. In the next sub-section of this chapter it will be

maintained that Murdoch's ideas concerning Plato's model and expressed in her philosophical essays are also inscribed in her fiction. Bearing in mind Murdoch's idea that literature may serve as a mode of explanation aiding moral philosophers, the model of development proposed by Plato will be viewed as a structure which successfully captures the challenges of the moral life awaiting Murdochian characters and serves as a matrix which she uses to advance the exploration of the most elusive aspects of the journey.

In *The Saint and the Artist: A Study of the Fiction of Iris Murdoch*, Peter Conradi observes:

The formal intensities of Murdoch's work, like those of Muriel Spark, are often in the broadest sense theological, stemming from a desire to show a pattern larger than individual purpose. It is no accident that the most closed of the novels are those with the headiest theological flavour, combining the severest view of mankind as fallen prisoners in the Cave – as slaves of their own unconscious – with the most urgent desire for redemption. (121)

This view of mankind conceptualized as “fallen prisoners” and “slaves of their own unconscious” seems to pervade the majority of Murdoch's novels. Murdoch's use of imagery reflecting this condition and alluding to Plato's Allegory has been noticed by scholars interested in the influence of Plato's philosophy on Murdoch's own ideas. In *Iris Murdoch's Retrieval of Plato*, Sonja Zuba points out that imagery alluding to Plato in Murdoch's philosophical essays is recurring. She observes that “[t]he images of sun and light, so prominent in Plato, recur throughout her philosophy and signal the ambiguous power, as she understands it, of the Good and its ability to illuminate the dark void of suffering, misery and despair that attends every human life” (Zuba 2). Although Zuba notices Murdoch's interest in Platonic imagery and states that it is a recurring element of her philosophical essays, she refrains from discussing in detail the use of such imagery in Murdoch's novels. In *Iris Murdoch and the Art of Imagining* Marije Altorf also testifies to Murdoch's predilection for meaningful imagery and emphasizes the importance of images and the imagination in her philosophical reflection (19). Altorf acknowledges the influence of Plato's Allegory on Murdoch's philosophical thought, but, like Zuba, she abstains from entering into a more detailed discussion devoted to the use of imagery in Murdoch's novels.

Murdoch's purposeful use of images alluding to Plato has also been noticed by Conradi. In his analysis of *Henry and Cato* Conradi comments on the image of bats emerging from a hole which affects the reader inasmuch as it “Platonises the imagination and observes

it as moving, once more, from a cave into the daylight” (*The Saint and the Artist* 289). Although Conradi acknowledges the connection between Plato’s Allegory of the Cave and Murdoch’s use of images on numerous occasions in *The Saint and the Artist*, his excellent study does not attempt to present a more comprehensive and systematized list of the images which Murdoch employs to connect her novels with Plato’s Allegory.

The fact that Murdoch purposefully refers to Plato’s Allegory in her novels seems to be acknowledged by scholars, yet the scope of Murdoch’s artistic representation of the Platonic Cave has not been exhaustively analysed yet. Although Murdoch wrote twenty-six novels, scholars who recognize her use of imagery alluding to the Allegory of the Cave discuss only a small number of her texts. Consequently, the existing studies, although invaluable, remain incomplete and invite further study of the topic. A perusal which would depict a wider spectrum of the images Platonizing the imagination of the readers seems to be indispensable.

## **I.2 The images of enclosed spaces similar to the Platonic Cave**

The following subchapter analyses Murdoch’s use of images which allude to Plato’s description of the Cave. It focuses on spatial representations of the Platonic Cave, especially rooms and houses. It will be argued that Murdoch creates images of confined spaces serving as entrapments to reconstruct the Platonic Cave within her narratives. It will be maintained that by using a variety of images that allude to the Allegory she encourages readers to interpret her novels in the light of Plato’s ideas concerning the nature of human existence, especially our natural propensity to rely on shadows and illusions.

The first emblematic element of Plato’s Allegory which is visibly present in Murdoch’s fiction is the image of a prisoner. People immersed in the state of *eikasia*, the lowest level of awareness, are described by Plato as facing the wall on which some shadowy images are projected. Oblivious to everything besides the projections, the prisoners in the state of *eikasia* are described by Plato as chained and enslaved in the dark cave by the force of their ignorance.

Murdoch seems to play with the multi-layered concept of being entrapped in the Cave. Many of her novels are entirely constructed around the idea of being locked in or out, literally entrapped in some physical places, and figuratively immersed in the world of fantasy. Households with passive inhabitants, immobilized by their mental, physical or emotional

dysfunctions are a permanent element—in her novels. Take for instance the Rectory in *The Time of the Angels*, Gaze Castle in *The Unicorn* or Seegard in *The Good Apprentice*. Many of Murdoch's characters are depicted as unable to move freely, which often evokes associations with different forms of imprisonment. The ageing Bruno Greensleave tied to his bed in *Bruno's Dream* or Nina in *The Flight from the Enchanter* who never leaves her workshop may serve as examples. Some of Murdoch's characters voluntarily detach from social life seeking seclusion in their studies, but her description of their surroundings suggests that they should also be seen as prisoners of their passions and illusions, David Crimond in *The Book and the Brotherhood* may serve as a case in point. Characters like Crystal Burde in *A Word Child*, Emily McHugh in *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* and Jesse Baltram in *The Good Apprentice* are examples of prisoners kept under lock and key by their relatives or their loved ones.

Characters whose existence is tightly connected to a spatial representation of the Cave, appear in almost every novel by Murdoch. Her narrative mode of depicting these various forms of entrapment surprises the reader by its ingenuity, but Murdoch's artistic venture of rendering the complexity of the state depicted by Plato will be discussed here mostly in connection with her use of imagery.

The entrapment in comfortable illusions presented by Plato in his Allegory is rendered by Murdoch through the use of spatial constructs resembling the Platonic Cave. In her novels Murdoch very carefully reconstructs the setting described by Plato and depicts the correlation between the characters' level of awareness and their surroundings. As in Plato, in Murdoch's fiction lack of knowledge is mirrored by constraining surroundings. The majority of characters in her novels are portrayed against a background of spaces and interiors that is reminiscent of the Platonic Cave and its atmosphere. Most of the characters burrow in their 'caves', imagined by her as upgraded versions of the gloomy underground world of ignorance depicted by Plato. Apart from the descriptions of actual geological formations, caves *per se*, like the Gunnar's Cave in *The Nice and the Good*, the concept of the Cave is invoked in Murdoch's descriptions of various rooms and houses, an interesting example of which can be found in *The Italian Girl*.

After the death of Lydia Narraway, the family gathers in one place to participate in her funeral. Among the mourners is Edmund Narraway, Lydia's son, who years ago fled from the toxic atmosphere of his family home and now returns to confront everything he had left

behind, including the painful memories of his lately deceased mother. During his stay, Edmund realizes that the house is inhabited by people desperately struggling with their demons. Divided by some unspeakable resentment and grudge, Otto Narraway and his wife Isabel are living in separate rooms. Their lovers, David and Elsa Levkin, ramble around the property at night, and only the mysterious 'Italian girl', largely ignored by everybody, keeps the household running. The nature of the human relationships in the household can be roughly summarized as a terrifying and surreal *status quo*, an impasse the characters are unable to break.

The arrangement of the rooms in the household resembles an agglomeration of private caves linked together by some dark corridors. The characters that are affected the most by the impasse and who display a certain reluctance to address their problems, seem to be incarcerated in carefully constructed spaces evocative of the Platonic Cave. Isabel Narraway, madly in love with David Levkin, her husband's apprentice, evades confrontation with reality by burying herself in the music of Wagner and Sibelius and escaping into a cosy room with a symbolic fireplace. When Edmund enters her room, he describes it in the following way: "The high bright coronet of the wood fire subsided, bringing a musty fragrance and such a blaze of warmth in my back that I had to edge away. The room flickered with golden light. Isabel wandered among the furniture like a distraught nymph waist-deep in the reeds" (*The Italian Girl* 105).

Isabel's cave is presented by Murdoch as filled with the warmth of the fireplace that provides an illusory sense of comfort. In the subsequent passages, however, the degree of Isabel's suffering is revealed: "'Do you remember,' said Isabel, 'how Saint Teresa describes a vision of a place reserved for her in hell? It's like a dark cupboard. Well, I live in that dark cupboard all the time. I am separated by my whole being from the good life you speak of. The only thing that consoles me now is sleep. Every night is an imitation of death'" (*The Italian Girl* 34).

A similar interior inspired by the Platonic Allegory may be found in *The Severed Head*. Martin Lynch-Gibbon, the first-person narrator, is first introduced to the reader against the cosy background of the room of his young mistress, Georgie Hands. Georgie and Martin are conducting a romantic affair and their secret trysts take place in her apartment. Martin's younger mistress resides in a room which, according to Martin, "had a glitter [...] as of some half despoiled treasure cavern" (*A Severed Head* 5). In the room there is a centrally located gas

fire in front of which the couple, half-oblivious of the rest of the world, spend their time together untroubled by pangs of conscience. The light of the fire and a trio of red candles peer through the darkness. Glowing sticks of incense are said to aromatize the air with the stupefying smell of poppy and sandal wood. The room, depicted as rather obscure, is characterized as having a stuffy and intoxicating atmosphere.

Apart from this atmosphere of sleepiness which may reflect the intellectual stupor with which the prisoners are struck, Murdoch signals their immersion in the world of shadows through the material possessions filling the room. Martin observes that Georgie's room is crammed with things she has received from him. Showered by Martin with refined gifts which satisfy his vanity and fantasies, her apartment is filled to the brim with Italian prints, French paperweights and other aesthetically pleasing *bric-à-brac*. The presence of ornaments seems to signify the elusive comfort and pleasure that prisoners of illusions experience by filling their consciousness with fantasies. The abundance of things filling the space signifies that characters reside in the cave of illusions, craftily recreated by Murdoch through the scattered objects and material goods.

Murdoch thus introduces the idea of a space filled with objects that serves as a spatial manifestation representing the illusions of her characters' inner lives. On the surface, the caves in which the characters reside may resemble comfortable retreats, burrows shielding them from the concerns of the outside world, but in fact they represent a dangerously alluring entrapment, too convenient to be abandoned.

In yet another of Murdoch's novel, *An Accidental Man*, an interesting and revealing comment on the objects filling Murdochian caves is presented:

Just for a moment all these things were proclaiming a secret truth, that they were tough, old, cold, and practically immortal. They had existed, they would exist, until they were burnt or smashed to pieces. They were unconnected and heartless. Ownership was an illusion. (*An Accidental Man* 79)

The objects with which Murdoch's characters surround themselves reflect the nuances of their inner lives and often figure as manifestations of the illusions they choose to believe in. Consequently, the act of rejecting and smashing those possessions should be interpreted as being connected with the uncomfortable process of confronting reality. Take for instance the scene in *An Accidental Man* in which Austin Gibson Grey breaks some valuable china that belongs to his older brother, Sir Matthew Gibson Grey. The relationship of these two

characters is heavily dominated by the false assumptions they both make about themselves, therefore the act of smashing Matthew's collection may be viewed as a violent, but symbolic act denoting the need to get rid of them.

Obsessive attachment to material goods seems to signify an unwillingness to reject comfortable illusions, but it should be emphasized that complete rejection of material goods seems to be unachievable for Murdoch's characters, thus signalling the low probability of human beings ever being able to leave the cave. Take for instance the depiction of Priscilla Saxe in *The Black Prince* whose deteriorating mental condition is reflected in her obsessive need to reclaim from her husband the jewellery she left behind when she ran away from him. Priscilla's desperate attempt to hold on to something material that shields her from the uncomfortable and overwhelming truth of being abandoned is not a unique case. In *Henry and Cato* Gerda Marshalsen is not willing to give up her comfortable life in Laxlinden Hall; in *The Philosopher's Pupil* Alex McCaffrey displays a fixation over her things disappearing and being hidden by Ruby Doyle, her long-standing servant, and in *An Accidental Man* Charlotte Ledgard is depicted as being unable to come to terms with the Will of her late mother which leaves her legacy to somebody else.

The attachment of Murdoch's characters to material possessions is described by Lorna Sage in her article "The Pursuit of Imperfection". In the article Sage astutely comments on the inability to reject illusion symbolized by Murdoch in the possessions with which the characters surround themselves. The reason behind this inability is explained in the following way: "In Iris Murdoch's world it is spiritual arrogance of the most dangerous kind to imagine you can become cultureless; she is not much troubled by the snobbish imperative of placing the quality of one kind of life over another, but she refuses to imagine a life that is 'free' of cultural patterns" (quoted in *The Saint and the Artist* 80). The objects filling the caves, these various bits and pieces, are the exteriorized fragments of the character's mental life, as the examples above illustrate, often filled with illusions, but being these scattered fragments of the consciousness, the objects constitute the extensions of the character's identity, a valuable connection to reality that anchors the individual in the illusory reality, but at the same time protects him or her from falling even deeper into the neurotic chasm.

As the examples discussed above reveal, caves are usually depicted by Murdoch as rather comfortable living spaces, often excessively adorned. Apart from spaces like rooms, Murdoch resorts to other, more surprising images to render the state of entrapment. An interesting



representation of the Platonic Cave can be found in *An Accidental Man*. Ludwig Leferrier is a young American who moves to England to study and thereby incidentally avoids the American draft. Well-educated and happily in love, he seems to have a bright future ahead of him. Not only is he engaged to a beautiful girl, but also he gains an academic post at Oxford University. Ludwig describes his new, comfortable 'home' in the following way: "Oxford had in these months grown huge and wide and magnetic in his consciousness. This too was a kind of being in love. He pictured himself there like a man picturing paradise" (*An Accidental Man* 5).

The life Ludwig creates for himself on British soil, away from his homeland and away from danger, is similar to an artificial cave protecting him from the confrontation with reality: "And now he had Gracie, a responsibility forever and a link with the easy world which he so much loved and feared. The English milieu into which she brought him was relaxed and liberal and hazy" (*An Accidental Man* 75). The cave in which Ludwig hides from the harsh truth takes the form of a whole town and even country. The illusory quality of the Platonic Cave is rendered here through the use of an idea of traditional English cosiness. Murdoch relies on the cultural stereotype of England as a country of reserved and distanced people. Furthermore, the country's geographical location, which makes it isolated from continental Europe, along with its long history of reluctance to intervene, is used by Murdoch to render the atmosphere of the cave, of the metaphorical 'burrow' Ludwig chooses to hide in: "The trouble was that on this side of the Atlantic there was no test to which he could put himself to make sure that he was acting on principle. Here there was nothing hard at all. The hard things were all over there" (*An Accidental Man* 75).

In Murdoch's fiction the image of the cave which resembles a lavish sanctuary and intoxicates with its lulling atmosphere is juxtaposed with the image of an ascetic cell, also evocative of the Platonic Allegory. Compared with the ostentatiously decorated rooms where one may flee from the outside world, the room of an ascetic, a person actively striving to disperse the illusions produced by the Ego, is usually lacking in excessive adornments.

An example of a cave which resembles a cell can be found in *The Flight from the Enchanter*. Instead of a lavish interior filled with trinkets and priceless accessories, Peter Saward dwells in a room filled with books, photographs, statues and reproductions of paintings, in other words the objects that occupy his busy mind: "Owing to the plane tree, the room was dark, and owing to the richly encrusted character of five of its surfaces, resembled

an underground cavern. The ceiling alone had resisted Peter Saward, and his failure to cover it over with pictures and suspended objects was due solely to a lack of mechanical skill” (*The Flight from the Enchanter* 21).

Similar rooms, inhabited by scholarly or intellectual characters striving for moral excellence, can be found in *The Unicorn* or in *The Book and the Brotherhood*, into which, respectively, Max Lejour and David Crimond retreat to conduct their researches. These ascetics live their lives as studious hermits away from public affairs. Although they are surrounded by people, they remain emotionally inaccessible and detach themselves from the problems of people surrounding them. Their diligence and curiosity motivate them to search for the meaning beyond the shadows, but their intellectual ambitions usually prevent them from properly connecting with others.

Such figures of distanced scholars can be compared with characters seeking seclusion in order to rediscover or reinvent themselves. Conradi points out that in Murdoch’s novels characters voluntarily aspiring to become hermits are recurring. Hilary Burde in *A Word Child*, Charles Arrowby in *The Sea, the Sea* and Bradley Pearson in *The Black Prince* all reside in secluded places and disengage from proper social life, but in contrast to Murdoch’s hard-working ascetics preoccupied with ideas and theories, these unreliable first-person narrators are excessively preoccupied with themselves. Instead of achieving enlightenment, they immerse themselves even more deeply in the world of shadows caused by uncontrolled indulgence in memories of the past mixed with fantasies. Tormented by remorse Hilary is not able to move past a traumatic experience and gives up his promising university career to live a life filled with mechanical routines. Charles, equally sentimental about his past, retreats to live in a house by the sea in order to write his memoirs, but is not willing to give up his fantasies about his first love, Mary Hartley Fitch. Bradley, a failed artist posing as a self-proclaimed aesthetic puritan waiting patiently for inspiration, steals away Julian, the daughter of his younger and more successful literary rival, Arnold Baffin, and escapes with her to a rented sea-cottage to perform the act which in his opinion will awake his dormant potential.

In comparison with scholars like Max or Peter, those cave-dwellers are usually disconnected from the real world on account of their ego-centrism. The images of the houses and retreats they choose serve Murdoch’s purpose of illustrating their distance from the truth and their inability to reject self-serving illusions. Their lack of connection with reality and with other people is expressed by Murdoch through spatial dimensions. Located outside the

city of London, the retreats chosen by Charles and Bradley are spatially removed from society. Shruff End is a small, old house built around 1910 and perched near the sea in some unidentified remote area. Although the house is sparsely furnished, which on the surface converges with the concept of asceticism, Charles's egoism is signalled by the presence of an oval mirror, to which he is very attached. Bradley takes Julian to Patara, a brick bungalow located in an empty flat landscape. Hilary, although living in a small, cramped and dark flat in Bayswater, feels separated from the 'real London': "London is unreal north of the park and south of the river. Unreality reaches its peak on the horrible hills of Hampstead. For me the park was the great divide between myself and a happier land into which I once thought that I was destined to enter" (*A Word Child* 5). Their attempts to escape from past or current problems in each case end in a spectacular failure. Conradi summarizes their struggles to live penitent ascetic lives in the following way: "In each case a pandemonium supervenes, an eruption of the forces of low Eros out of which the puritan hero had attempted a premature levitation" (*The Saint and the Artist* 90).

Apart from rooms and houses which are evocative of the Platonic Cave, one must mention Murdoch's use of other, less obviously enclosed spaces that remind her readers about the condition of a prisoner as depicted by Plato. A short account has been provided in *Didactic Demon* by Richard Kane who observes that Murdoch makes frequent use of tight, enclosed areas: the images denoting the presence of neurotic and self-absorbing fantasies such as the hall closet with a peep hole in *The Time of the Angels* or the subterranean cell in *Henry and Cato* (24). Another scholar who points out the ubiquitous presence of small enclosed locations in Murdoch's fiction is Conradi. In his analysis of *The Time of the Angels* he notices Murdoch's use of spaces evocative of the Platonic Cave and claims that "[c]ave-like environments and enclosures fill the book" (*The Saint and the Artist* 172). Among the images of enclosed spaces which he enumerates are Elisabeth Fisher's locked room, the coal cellar into which her uncle Marcus falls, and the linen cupboard from which Muriel Fisher secretly observes her cousin Elisabeth.

The most striking image of an enclosed space mentioned by Conradi is the cupboard full of dead birds. Conradi explains: "The cupboard full of dead birds which Caryl summons as an image of the world's horror with which to torment Marcus is the most memorable of these enclosures" (*The Saint and the Artist* 172). It is worth noting that a similar image of dead birds in a cage appears also in *The Nice and the Good*, when John Ducane finds some dead pigeons after descending to the underground corridors. The birds are meant to be used for

some black magic rituals and remain a horrifying image, which may be understood as a comment on the nature of human existence, the suffocating life of a prisoner dwelling in the darkness of solipsistic fantasies, therefore constituting a link between Murdoch's novels and Plato's Allegory.<sup>21</sup> Apart from the dead birds found underground, the image of caged suffering is evoked by the perhaps significantly named character of Jessica Bird, Ducane's lover, depicted as entrapped in her apartment and in a relationship without a future, and by the image of a seagull with a broken wing, killed by Theo Gray in an act of mercy.

These examples from *The Nice and the Good* highlight a connection in Murdoch's fiction between the condition of a cave-dweller immersed in illusions and a trapped animal. The similarity is present and emphasized in many of her novels. Take for instance *The Italian Girl* in which Isabel's husband, Otto Narraway, is living with the burden of infidelity and is depicted as dwelling within a cave of his creation. What is striking in Murdoch's characterization of Otto is his regression to an animal-like state. In order to successfully evade confrontation with his wife and the rest of the family, Otto retreats to a place described as 'the magic brothel' (*The Italian Girl* 55). The summer house in which Otto secretly meets with his lover is described as having a "stuffy atmosphere" and being filled with "a humid pungent smell" (*The Italian Girl* 61). Dwelling in his cave and deeply immersed in the state of *eikasia*, Otto is depicted as having no refinement and as regressing into some primitive state. He is described as "shaggy" and evoking the "the sense of deprivation" (*The Italian Girl* 61). Edmund comments on his state in the following way: "He seemed more like the debris of a human being than like a man" (*The Italian Girl* 61). His extramarital relationship with sensuous Elsa turns Otto into a mentally sluggish creature, focused on satisfying his basic needs.

Another novel in which the image of a trapped animal is used in connection with Plato's thought is *The Unicorn*. In this novel Hannah Crean-Smith is compared to the mythical creature of the title.<sup>22</sup> Kept under lock and key in Gaze Castle by her vindictive husband, Hannah lives in a room with outdated accessories, which are merely shadows of their former glory: "The room was decrepit and ponderously old-fashioned like the one below, but

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<sup>21</sup> Interest in birds and bird imagery is displayed by Murdoch in her collection of poetry. Iris Murdoch published in 1978 the collection of poems *A Year of Birds*. These poems describe each month through birds, from January's seagulls, March's doves, and June's magpies to October's swans.

<sup>22</sup> Murdoch's characters who live in seclusion are often perceived and viewed as resembling supernatural creatures. Take for instance Isabel in *The Italian Girl*, who is compared to a nymph, Elizabeth in *The Time of Angels*, compared to a fairy, and Dorina in *An Accidental Man* compared to the goddess Flora.

immensely, almost too much inhabited; and Marian felt herself shut in, almost menaced, by the circle of faded armchairs piled with books and papers” (*The Unicorn* 24). When Marian Taylor, who comes to Gaze Castle as a governess, enters Hannah’s room for the first time, she notices a small turf fire burning in a big grate brightening up the dark interior. The decorations evoke the atmosphere of a Platonic Cave. Conradi notes that “Hannah’s room, cut off from direct sunlight, is perpetually warmed by a small turf-fire; it is half Platonic Cave, half ascetic’s cell” (*The Saint and the Artist* 162).

What makes Hannah’s condition even more evocative of the prisoners’ conditions described in the Allegory is the oppressive character of her entrapment. For Hannah the house is a prison with guards. Denis Nolan, Hannah’s loyal servant, explains her situation to Marian in the following way:

‘You ask what is the matter with this place. I will tell you. What is the matter with it is that it is a prison.’ ‘A prison?’ said Marian, astonished, and tense now at the nearness of the revelation. Her heart beat painfully. ‘A prison? Who is the prisoner?’ ‘Mrs Crean-Smith.’ She felt that she had half known it. ‘And who are the gaolers?’ ‘Mr Scottow. Miss Evercreech. Jamesie. You. Me.’. (*The Unicorn* 59)

Although Hannah can be viewed in terms of personifying a mythical unicorn, her resemblance to some less captivating, but more realistic creatures is stressed through Murdoch’s use of the images of fishes and bats. Nolan who feeds and protects the pond with the fish is also shown to take a good care of Hannah. He assists her with her daily routines and seems to be very attentive to her needs. The constant danger of being eaten by herons which the fish in his pond are exposed to, corresponds to the danger in Hannah’s surroundings of being exposed to the predatory selfish instincts of other human beings.

To comment on the condition of the character entrapped in her cave and unable to grasp the nature of the surrounding world, Murdoch deploys another image which is meaningfully connected with the Platonic Cave. The image of a bat appears when Denis takes the animal out of a box and shows it to Hannah and Marian. We learn from their reactions that they instinctively feel a strange affinity with the creature: “The bat, a little pipistrel, was pulling itself slowly along the rug, with jerky movements of its crumpled leathery arms [...] Marian laughed and then felt a sudden desire to cry. Without knowing why, she felt she could hardly bear Mrs Crean-Smith and the bat together, as if they were suddenly the same grotesque helpless thing” (*The Unicorn* 40).

The same strategy of mirroring her characters' entrapment through metaphoric images of small animals is also employed in *The Flight from the Enchanter*. The image of a fish is again used to symbolize the fragility of human existence, existence in a state of continuous entrapment evocative of the condition of prisoners described by Plato. The fish, vulnerable and entrapped in the tank, reveal the true nature of characters appearing in the novel. Although the narrative presents Mischa Fox as a demonic enchanter and Rosa Keepe as a victim, their attitude towards small animals that come their way shows that truly damaging and violent acts are paradoxically the domain of Rosa. The pity showed by Mischa and the indifference displayed by Rosa indicate their respective attitudes towards other human beings. During the party at Mischa's house Rosa makes a scene in front of the guests by breaking the fish tank, at which she does not hesitate to throw a stone. She is as oblivious to the consequences of her actions as she is oblivious to the problems of her friend Nina. Mischa's effort, on the other hand, is focused on protecting the fish, which is illustrated when he scolds Annette Cockayne for catching them out of sheer playful curiosity. His protectiveness is also evident during his visit to John Rainborough's house when Mischa interrupts John's forceful attempt to impose himself on Annette, and in his willingness to protect Rosa from the Lusiewicz brothers. In this novel, filled with images of small creatures like moths and ants, the ability to notice their existence and to empathize with them is a sign of personal and spiritual maturity, of being able to relate to the lot of a fellow being. The inability to do so, on the other hand, connotes the immersion in the ego-centric illusions.

Images of small animals are used to supplement Murdoch's depiction of cave dwellers and constitute a meaningful reflection in the Platonic vein on the existence of prisoners. The ability to see the distinctiveness of those small creatures translates into the character's ability to empathise with other human beings. As well as the examples provided above, images of small animals reflecting upon the nature of human existence can be found in *Bruno's Dream*, in which the eponymous Bruno is interested in spiders, in *The Bell*, in which Dora Greenfield is depicted saving a butterfly, and in *The Good Apprentice*, in which Edward, staying at the house of his father, Jesse Baltram, as a form of ordeal and therapy, sees a circle of moths.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> The image of a moth and sympathy for its existence is expressed by Murdoch in her private journal, part of which is published in *Iris Murdoch, A Writer at War: Letters and Diaries, 1939-1945*, (London: Short, 2010). Here the image of a moth appears twice: on the 17<sup>th</sup> August 1939 she describes in a poetic way a night when she went for a walk alone and thinking of "the Demon Lover" became "quite alarmed by a big moth that touched her hand" (37) and on the 25<sup>th</sup> August 1939 she describes a scene in Brightwell when she kills a dozen of them, calls it "a wicked thing, killing soft creatures like moths" (59), and recalls "sweet James 'catching a moth in a golden net'" (59). The moth image appears in *The Flight from the Enchanter*, *Henry and Cato* and *The Good Apprentice*.

Furthermore, in Murdoch's novels the confinement of the caves is usually juxtaposed with a refreshing perspective offered by natural landscape. As previously established, settings in Murdoch's fiction tend to mirror the mental state of her characters. Therefore, by comparison with the restraining interiors signalling immersion in illusions, contact with nature can be interpreted as synonymous with an innate propensity to drift towards the Good and away from illusion.

In her philosophical essay "The Sovereignty of Good over the Other Concepts", Murdoch offers an explanation of the role of nature as diverting our attention from self-centric thinking, therefore having the potential to replace illusion:

Then suddenly I observe a hovering kestrel. In a moment everything is altered. The brooding self with its hurt vanity has disappeared. There is nothing now but the kestrel. And when I return to thinking of the other matter it seems less important. And of course this is something which we may also do deliberately: give attention to nature in order to clear our minds of selfish care. ("The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts" 369)

In a different philosophical essay entitled "On God and Good" Murdoch expresses a very similar idea, claiming that contact with nature is 'unselfing': "Unsentimental contemplation of nature exhibits the same quality of detachment: selfish concerns vanish, nothing exists except the things which are seen" ("On 'God' and 'Good'" 353). The understanding of nature's role proffered by Murdoch in her essays allows us to conclude that meaningful references to nature in her fiction may serve the purpose of informing her reader of changes that are taking place in her characters' outlook.

The difference between characters who prefer the outdoors and those who retreat into their caves is prominent in *The Italian Girl*. Flora Narraway, Otto's daughter and Edmund's niece, is an adolescent girl, frequently presented by Murdoch against the background of the garden. Surrounded by flowers and hidden from the entire world, Flora is said to spend many hours daydreaming in the garden. Edmund, the first-person narrator, describes her secret sanctuary in the following way: "It was a luscious miniature jungle scene such as would have delighted the eye of Henri Rousseau; and indeed, for all my anxieties and my sense of a great pain postponed, it took my breath away at that moment and I could hardly help seeing the distant pattern of the sharp bamboo leaves, framed by the birch pillars, as a fine subject for an engraving" (*The Italian Girl* 47). The way Flora is portrayed alters when she has to face the problem of unwanted pregnancy. Murdoch's portrayal of her as a creature of nature, innocent

and pure, shifts with Flora's decision to get an abortion, which represents the challenges of the moral life. Flora is now described against the interior of the house. Because of the burden of her decision, she becomes domesticated. After the scandalous details of her parents' marriage are finally revealed and 'the storm' is over, Flora decides to stay in the family house with her father, Otto. Innocent Flora, once part of nature and open, outdoor space, of the woods, is now one of the adults, which is made clear by her new role as nurturer of her father and by her portrayal against the background of the house.

In her copy of *Two Classes of Men* by David Newsome, Murdoch underlined the following fragment: "All little children are Platonists, and it is their education which makes men Aristotelians" (8, Murdoch's emphasis). This change, a transition from natural, spontaneous admiration for beauty and nature, towards a more reasonable Aristotelian approach is rendered by Murdoch through her description of Flora's surroundings.<sup>24</sup> From being close to nature, from being a natural 'Platonist', Flora becomes domesticated by her need to learn to reason and to make complicated moral decisions that are thrust on her by adult life. She ends up displaced and relocated by the challenges of the moral life which push her away from the Good which she once experienced so intuitively and effortlessly. Her portrayal of Flora's enforced growing-up thus illustrates how Murdoch understands the role of nature and how she uses the images of nature to provide an alternative to the stuffy and suffocating spaces mirroring Plato's Cave.

The contrast between the life inside buildings, evoking the Platonic Cave, and open spaces is discussed by Conradi in *The Saint and the Artist*. In a section devoted to *The Bell* and *The Unicorn*, Conradi describes the scenery of the Romantic sublime as juxtaposed with the confinement of Gaze Castle. Conradi points out that the moment of Effingham Cooper's epiphany takes place outside the Castle, in the bog: "The beauty of the universe is revealed to him through the momentary extinction of his own self-presence, and he is rewarded by a further vision of a bog as newly created, in the book's unique sunrise and only prism of primary colour" (*The Saint and the Artist* 165). In the first critical study of Murdoch's fiction, *Degrees of Freedom*, A.S. Byatt also points out that the only character in *The Unicorn* not concerned with spiritual values at all is Alice Lejour, a horticulturist who is concerned with nature (181). The same contrast can be observed in other novels by Murdoch. In *The Sacred*

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<sup>24</sup> In "The Idea of Perfection" Murdoch calls Aristotle the "Shakespeare of science" ("The Idea of Perfection" 327). Aristotle is recognized as a philosopher and scientist because his writings, apart from concerning aesthetics, poetry and rhetoric, deal also with physics, biology and zoology.



and the *Profane Love Machine* the dramatic events taking place in the two households of Harriet Gavender and Emily McHugh may be juxtaposed with the natural predilection for animals and nature of Luca McHugh, the eight-year illegitimate son of Blaise Gavender. The boy makes secret visits to the unfamiliar world, the Hood House, and appears in the garden, standing under the acacia tree. In *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* a cathartic scene takes place in a meadow when Peter Foster confesses his love to his aunt, Morgan Browne. Numerous such examples of natural imagery suggest that usually those who are “natural Platonists” are meaningfully connected to it. The twins Henrietta and Edward Biranne in *The Nice and the Good* are depicted as being intensely interested in the animal kingdom and constantly playing with things like bird nests, while Toby Gashe in *The Bell* is presented spending his summer holidays exploring the woods surrounding Imber Court.

Among the various images Murdoch uses which are antithetic to the confinement of the cave, she gives special place to images of water. Jędrzejkiewicz believes that the element of water, especially the sea, symbolizes “indefiniteness” and the “contingency of reality” (*Perspektywa etyczna* 31). Water, according to Jędrzejkiewicz, epitomizes these concepts because these very qualities are perceived by Murdoch as aptly illustrating the world in which we exist. Thus, water may be related to ‘the unlocking’, ‘the opening of eyes’, as compared to the apprehension of the reflections on its surface.

Conradi observes that in Murdoch’s fiction there are many ordeals by water which he enumerates: Effingham’s in the bog in *The Unicorn*, Tim Reede’s in the canal in *Nuns and Soldiers*, and Ducane and Pierce’s in the sea-cave in *The Nice and the Good* (*The Saint and the Artist* 138). Conradi additionally emphasizes that “[t]o be able to swim, for Murdoch, is almost to possess moral competence” (*The Saint and the Artist* 138). Therefore, water is an image which Murdoch purposefully introduces when describing important moments or quasi-epiphanies. Take for instance Effingham’s realization that he is in love with Alice in *The Unicorn*. After years of chasing after Hannah, his idealized *princess lointaine*, Effingham finally notices the presence of Alice, his true love. The moment of this realization is presented against the background of the sea: “Alice lying immersed in the pool, her head resting against a gently sloping rock at the far end. The scene, wrapped about by the loudly roaring waves, had a weird stillness, as if Alice had lain there already a long time, a fish-like sea goddess, brooding since antiquity in some watery hole” (*The Unicorn* 194).

Immersion in water constitutes a contrast with the immersion in fantasy experienced by dwellers of the caves. The change that water symbolizes, that is, the passage from one state or element to another, which is a precondition of the Platonic ascent, is captured in Hannah's description of the salmon pool to Marian: "He *will* show you the salmon pool, I expect. Have you ever seen salmon leaping? It's a most moving sight. They spring right out of the water and struggle up the rocks. Such a fantastic bravery, to enter another element like that. Like souls approaching God" (*The Unicorn* 43). Water is imaginatively evoked in almost every novel by Murdoch and the image of it is always used to inform the reader of the spiritual and moral progress made by her characters, who strive to break away from the gloomy caves of their making, take for instance in *The Sandcastle*, *The Philosopher's Pupil*, or *The Sea, the Sea*.

### **I.3 The world of shadows. Murdoch's depiction of the state of *eikasia* and Plato's distrust of sensory data**

The following sub-section of this chapter develops the argument that Platonic distrust of the senses, especially the sense of sight, is significantly present in Murdoch's fiction. It explores Plato's description of reliance on sensory data as being connected to the prisoners' limited understanding of reality and traces Murdoch's reinterpretation of this idea evidenced in her novels. It will be argued that in her portrayal of contemporary cave dwellers, Murdoch pays particular attention to depicting the state of *eikasia*, that is, the immersion in illusions through imagery signalling impaired vision on the part of her characters.

In Plato's Allegory of the Cave the state of *eikasia* is presented as resulting from reliance on sensory data. Socrates states: "The prison-house is the world of sight" (*The Republic* 179). *Eikasia*, the first level of cognition introduced by Plato, can be characterized as the state in which a prisoner separates out elementary sense perceptions from an original sensory continuum.<sup>25</sup> In *Plato and the Good: Illuminating the Darkling Vision* Rosemary Desjardins observes that at this stage intelligence begins to introduce structure, which is *a-logos* (irrational, incoherent), *a-metros* (unmeasured, unstructured), and *a-nous* (mindless), while the prisoner experiences merely images (*eikones*): "[Plato] compares this level to

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<sup>25</sup> Desjardins observes that the term *eikasia* posed a significant challenge to the scholars: "The term has spawned the variety of translations, among which are found Schleiermacher's 'probability', Jowett's 'perception of shadows', Shorey's 'conjecture' and 'picture-thinking', and finally, Cornford's and Grube's 'imagination'" (58). Despite the somewhat confusing existence of the variety of options to choose from, Desjardins argues that Ross's 'apprehension of images' and Lafrance's 'power to apprehend and produce images' seem to be the closest to Plato's intended meaning (58).

evanescent shadows and images, or reflections on water, much as we ourselves talk of moments of awareness within the ‘stream’ of consciousness” (58).

Since proper understanding of the state of *eikasia* as understood by Plato is crucial, I will refer to John Cooper’s comments to explain it further. In his article “Plato on Sense-Perception and Knowledge (*Theaetetus* 184-186)” Cooper points out that Plato “distinguishes between the role played by the mind in perception and that played by the senses, and he contrasts this use of mind with a higher reflective use in which it works independently of the body and its sense-faculties and judges that the objects of the senses exist and they possess other *χοινά*” (129).<sup>26</sup> Thus, according to Plato, the senses do not contain knowledge, but provide material that is later on processed by the mind. Therefore, for Plato knowledge does not lie with the sensory powers of the body. Cooper claims that Plato draws a line between perception and reflection, differentiating between simple sensory awareness and thinking about whatever one is presented with by the sensations (131).

Murdoch seems to ascribe a particular meaning to the way in which human beings perceive the outside world and process the data. In her essays she emphasizes the importance of perception followed by a thoughtful reflection which she calls ‘attention’, and it is not an exaggeration to state that her moral thought not only revolves around the concept of proper vision but is also based on numerous visual metaphors. In “Against Dryness” Murdoch explains that the term ‘attention’ she has embraced is borrowed from Simone Weil, who said “that morality was a matter of attention, not of will” (“Against Dryness” 293), and in “The Idea of Perfection”, Murdoch explains why she adopted the concept: “I have used the word ‘attention’, which I borrow from Simone Weil, to express the idea of a just and loving gaze directed upon an individual reality. I believe this to be the characteristic and proper mark of the active moral agent” (“The Idea of Perfection” 327).

The concept of attention plays a vital role in Murdoch’s moral philosophy and illuminates her emphasis on the proper use of the sense of sight, in both a literal and a figurative meaning. In the same essay Murdoch claims: “I can only choose within the world I can *see*, in the moral sense of ‘see’ which implies that clear vision is a result of moral imagination and moral effort. There is also of course ‘distorted vision’, and the world ‘reality’

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<sup>26</sup>Cooper explains that for Plato *χοινά* stand for common terms or in other words the predicates of judgements: “Plato explicitly includes among the *χοινά* existence, identity, difference, similarity, dissimilarity, being one, odd and even, good and bad, beautiful and ugly; all of these are properties of the objects of several, perhaps all, of the senses” (128).

inevitably appears as a normative word” (“The Idea of Perfection” 329). Her vision of the moral life thus depends on the conscious use of the sense of sight, so its relevance for moral reflection may be linked to the Allegory of the Cave and Plato’s distrust towards the senses.

The importance ascribed by Murdoch to proper apprehension of reality and Plato’s approach towards sensory data seem to converge. The connection becomes more visible when we realize that a part of Murdoch’s appreciation of Weil’s philosophy and ideas comes from their shared propensity for Plato’s thought. In her study of the influence of the writings of Weil on Murdoch’s fiction Gabriele Griffin states that Murdoch admired Weil’s “passionate Platonism” (58), and Kate Larson, another scholar studying the influence of Weil on Murdoch, also testifies to the connection between Murdoch’s and Weil’s ideas: “And, indeed, the reading of Weil has deeply influenced Murdoch’s central concepts of *attention* and *unselfing* (in Weil’s terminology *decreation*), cornerstones in Murdoch’s original version of a Platonic philosophy” (153).

Lawrence Blum has analysed the visual metaphors used by Murdoch in her moral philosophy and points out that she distinguishes between perceiving, seeing, vision, and attention (307). His exploration of her three works “The Sovereignty of Good”, “Vision and Choice in Morality” and *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* brings him to the conclusion that Murdoch’s focus on the visual (perception, attention, seeing) may have blinded her to other aspects of moral being (deliberation, agency, engagement, and response) (Blum 323). Although Blum remains sceptical about the accuracy of Murdoch’s model to depict the nuances of the moral life, he acknowledges that Murdoch’s contribution to contemporary moral philosophy lies mostly in bringing perception and attention into a conception of moral agency as a corrective to the overemphasis on will.

The role of the senses and of sensory data in formulating our judgments is the problem which Murdoch touches upon in her novels through her use of imagery. Lack of proper vision as indicating a propensity for fantasy and a tendency to make poor moral choices is depicted by Murdoch in *The Italian Girl*. Otto is described as “deaf and blind” (*The Italian Girl* 101). The man living in the world of shadows seems to be devoid of the capacity to confront and process reality. Otto makes the following observation about himself: “I eat and eat and drink and drink. I try to swallow the world” (*The Italian Girl* 40). By analogy to the state of *eikasia*, this character is presented as overusing intoxicating substances which impair his senses. The over-use of alcohol and obsessive eating are symptoms of not being able to confront his

messy life. Otto concludes: “The trouble about becoming an alcoholic is that ordinary states of consciousness are simply a torment. I suppose that *is* being an alcoholic” (*The Italian Girl* 73).

Murdoch seems to use alcohol or other substances altering consciousness to render the blurred vision that occurs in the state of *eikasia*. In her novels we may find numerous instances of characters whose inability to attend to reality is coupled with their predilection for drinking. Austin in *An Accidental Man* kills a child when he is drunk and together with his friend Mitzi Ricardo he spends long evenings drinking. Duncan Cumbus’s escape into alcohol when his wife Jean leaves him in *The Book and the Brotherhood* or Randall Peronett’s excessive drinking in *An Unofficial Rose* may serve as different examples of this strategy. Self-indulgence, lack of moderation in drinking and eating in Murdoch’s works indicate the state of *eikasia*, because the hallucinations and creations of the intoxicated mind seem to offer powerful equivalents of distorted and inadequate pictures of reality produced by the Ego.<sup>27</sup>

Problems with vision as symbolic of poor judgement and inability to read the situation properly are also signalled in Murdoch’s fiction through images of optical devices. Richard Kane observes that “Murdoch’s didactic work demonstrates that true evil and demonic power really result from a failure of vision” (46). Discussing *The Unicorn*, Kane draws attention to Murdoch’s symbolic use of binoculars and field glasses. He observes that Murdoch links problems with characters’ comprehension with their impaired vision. Kane argues that tools associated with sight are used to get a better view, and signify an attempt to understand other people: “Miss Taylor’s new binoculars, which she first uses upon arriving at the castle, seem especially symbolic in that throughout the entire novel she, along with the reader, engages in a series of attempts to bring people and places into focus” (46).

Another example of Murdoch’s use of these instruments can be found in *The Nice and the Good*. When Mary Clothier picks up a pair of binoculars to look at the sea, she notices that the “binoculars are uncanny” (*The Nice and the Good* 97). Curious about a shiny object bobbing on the sea, she tries focusing the binoculars on it. The sensation is described as

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<sup>27</sup> The dreamy and sleepy atmosphere of the caves created by Murdoch corresponds to the characters’ intellectual lethargy. Sleepiness is another sign denoting *eikasia*, which expresses lack of willingness to confront reality. The theme of overdosing sleeping pills as a sign of the inability to cope with life appears in *The Flight from the Enchanter* (Annette Cockayne’s failed suicidal attempt), in *An Accidental Man* (Mitzi and Charlotte both try to commit suicide), and *The Black Prince* (Priscilla commits suicide by taking sleeping tablets).

follows: “As she turned them into focus she could see the leaves on the trees of the wood as if they were inches in front of her face. She had never handled such powerful glasses” (*The Nice and the Good* 97). Mary witnesses a romantic scene involving John Ducane and Kate Gray, the wife of Octavian Gray. This discovery made after using the glasses, suggests that she will have to change her views pertaining to the people in her surroundings, especially Ducane. The use of binoculars to symbolize the attempt to understand others better appears also in *The Flight from the Enchanter* when Calvin Blick hands Rosa a pair of glasses. Rosa uses them to look at Mischa walking on the beach: “The shock of seeing him was so great that Rosa lowered the glasses at once” (*The Flight from the Enchanter* 280). The glasses allow Rosa to see a different side of Mischa, more human and down-to-earth, which differs considerably from her view of him as a powerful and merciless enchanter.

As well as discussing Murdoch’s deployment of optic devices, Kane mentions the significant role ascribed to photography in her fiction. He observes that in both *The Flight from the Enchanter* and in *The Unicorn*, the motif of photos recurs: “Jamesie’s pornographic photographs of Gerald, just like Calvin Blick’s photographs of Rosa in *The Flight from the Enchanter*, also suggest the attempt to capture fluid reality in a fixed form” (Kane 47). Murdoch’s scrupulous depiction of sensory deficiencies can be linked to her use of images of devices capturing the surfaces, of apparatus like cameras. Pictures taken by such devices resemble the images intercepted by the prisoners of the cave from the continuum of the shadows.

Relying on Plato’s Allegory, in which the prisoners are exposed to incomplete pictures of reality, Murdoch further employs images of reflections and shadows to render the state of *eikasia*. Take, for instance, the depiction of Dora in *The Bell*. The wife of an older, possessive and controlling man, Dora is almost deprived of her own judgment. She is presented as a person who embarks on a quest for intellectual independence, who, in the initial stage of her journey is often distracted by images of herself in the mirror or reflections in the water, which constitute the material for her musings: “The sun was shining, the lake was hard and full of reflections, the Norman tower presented to her one golden face and one receding into shadow. Dora had the odd feeling that all this was inside her head. There was no way of breaking into this scene, for it was all imaginary” (*The Bell* 182). This passage may serve as an example of Murdoch’s strategy which involves supplementing Dora’s mental state and cognitive deficiencies with visual images associated with the state of *eikasia*. In her critical study of Murdoch’s works, Deborah Johnson observes this link between imagery and

the character's perception: "the still and picturesque landscape becomes a disconcerting mirror of her [Dora's] bewildered emotional state" (83).

The way in which Dora perceives the surrounding world changes after a meeting with Toby Gashe, an adolescent boy, who pushes Dora to re-evaluate her approach to life. In their initial meetings Toby is often perceived by Dora near water, so that his reflection is among the first manifestations of the boy's presence in Dora's life. Not yet fully realizing his ensuing significance to her, Dora perceives him in the following way: "Then, with a shock of alarm, she saw that there was a dark figure standing quite near on the edge of the water, very still" (*The Bell* 44). The strange quality of the water, as the source of deluding reflections, is also recognized by Toby himself:

There would be little point in underwater swimming here; the water would be too opaque to see anything. He stood, poised on the brink, looking down. The centre of the lake was glittering, colourlessly brilliant, but along the edge the green banks could be seen reflected and the blue sky, the colours clear yet strangely altered into the colours of a dimmer and more obscure world: the charm of swimming in still waters, that sense of passing through the looking-glass, of disturbing and yet entering that other scene that grows out of the roots of this one. Toby took a step or two and hurled himself in. (*The Bell* 145)

Toby, an innocent and guilt-free young man, can swim in the lake like a fish. Instead of relying on the images shimmering on the surface, he can plunge into the other side of the looking glass and immerse himself freely in the dark waters of the subconscious without fear because, by contrast with Dora, he does not live on the level of *eikasia*. Characters in the state of *eikasia*, like Dora, are able to perceive only incomplete and one-dimensional reflections of actual human beings.

When describing the state of *eikasia* and the characters' inability to apprehend the world more precisely Murdoch also employs the image of the mirror, which again illustrates the presence of fragmentary pictures in the character's consciousness. In *An Accidental Man*, Austin Gibson Grey, a self-delusioned man who blames the whole world for his misfortunes, is characterized in the following way: "He had fallen through the looking-glass and could never get back. [...] For him the Inner Light was early quenched" (*An Accidental Man* 17). Austin breaks through to the other side of the mirror, but remains trapped in the world of shadows, choosing this comfortable, but inadequate picture of the world:

Looking-glass man, he thought, trying vainly for the millionth time to flex the fingers of his right hand. If only I could turn myself inside out and make

the fantasy real, the real fantasy. But the trouble was that there were no good dreams any more, nothing good or holy or truly desirable any more even in dreams, only that awful thing behind the flickering screen. Dorina had been a good dream. There had seemed to be another place where Dorina walked barefoot in the dew with her hair undone. Altogether elsewhere there were cool meadows and flowers and healing waters. (*An Accidental Man* 14)

Mirrors, objects reflecting the appearance without providing insight into people's complex psyches, serve the purpose of indicating the tendency to rely on sensory data unsupported by any deeper analysis. These shadowy representations of other human beings constitute a permanent element of Murdoch's prose. In *Under the Net*, the whole narrative is pervaded by images of women who instead of being perceived in their whole complexity resemble some caricatured phantoms. Seen through the eyes of the protagonist Jake Donaghue, they become shadows, wearing high-heeled shoes, the masks of make-up and elaborate coiffures, whose images are caught in mirrors. As Johnson observes, the rose-tinted mirrors in the hairdressing salon are a beautifully apt image which emphasizes the deceptiveness and allure of those surfaces (23). In *The Unicorn*, Hannah is also depicted as surrounded by mirrors. Being a hostage of other people's fantasies about her, she eventually loses contact with reality and with her own *self*: "She was much given to looking at herself in the mirrors. She moved now from glass to glass" (*The Unicorn* 43). Hannah, constantly facing her own reflection, reminds us that the key to understanding the other lies in the eye of the beholder. This representation of her own persona through the use of mirrors illustrates the way in which she is perceived by others, as a phantom, a one-dimensional fantasy. The mirrors in her room and Hannah's preoccupation with her own reflection symbolize the shadowy and illusory quality of her existence, with no real and complete identity. The image of a mirror used to denote a character's inability to look for meaning beyond the sensory data and illusions offered by the Ego can also be found in *The Italian Girl* (Isabel) or in *The Sea, the Sea* (Charles).

The state of *eikasia* is the condition portrayed by Murdoch to perfection. The examples provided in this subchapter illustrate the diversity of her images which to connect her fiction with Plato's philosophical thought. The characters' experiencing of blurring of the vision, together with the use of imagery evoking the display of shadows, all remind us of Plato's Cave as a thought-provoking allegory of a failure to see the world as it is. Zuba observes that in Murdoch's fiction "[e]verything is described using metaphors of vision, which is not surprising as, for Murdoch, 'how we see our situation is itself, already, a moral activity' (*MGM*, 315) as perception itself is already a mode of evaluation" (247). Murdoch's characters, living similarly to Plato's prisoners in the modern equivalent of the ancient Cave,



not unlike Plato's prisoners struggle to comprehend the true nature of the shadows displayed in front of them and to improve their ability to see properly. Surrounded by reflections, shadows and illusions, whether in the form of pictures or reflections in the mirror, they are depicted as staring at the world, but remaining unable to see what is hidden under the surface.

#### **I.4 The Images of the fire and the sun: the characters' development in the light of the Platonic model**

Analysis of the images used by Murdoch to describe the state of *eikasia* shows that she is very consistent in her appropriation of Plato's Allegory of the Cave. This consistency is also clear in her rendition of the changes taking place in her characters' vision when they move from one level of awareness to another. The following sub-section of this chapter traces Murdoch's use of imagery to render the changes which occur while reaching a new level of awareness. Special attention will be given to the images of the fire and the sun and to Murdoch's reinterpretation of Plato's model of spiritual and intellectual ascent.

The development of characters is the result of their effort to find the sources of knowledge, truth and goodness in their lives. Therefore, the cave as the place where ignorance and illusion reside becomes also the place where the rite of passage starts. The process of leaving the Cave and achieving intellectual maturity in Plato's description consists of certain phases or steps that the prisoner must take to achieve the goal.

In Murdoch's fiction the process of intellectual maturation is presented as a journey during which imagery is used to illustrate the changes that take place along the way. To purify their vision some of her characters descend underground in a symbolic act of confronting the workings of the Ego and their own propensity to spin fantasies. Therefore, the theme of descent is connected with the need to learn more about oneself. It represents the process of exploring the unconscious, of checking empirically the authenticity of illusions, and may be considered as a dangerous, but often decisive moment in the lives of the characters.

The theme of the descent to the underground, in other words the *katabasis*, is an old epic convention which dates back to Greek mythology. The hero performing the *katabasis* descends to the underworld as Orpheus does entering the underworld in order to bring Eurydice back to the world of the living. The characteristic feature of *katabasis* is that it allows the hero to explore the supernatural underworld, such as Hades or Hell. A

*katabasis* must be followed by an *anabasis*, the exit, in order to be considered a true *katabasis* rather than death.<sup>28</sup>

The theme of descent and exploration of the territory lying below the surface in order to disperse illusions is prominent in Murdoch's fiction. The theme of 'perfecting the spirit', the rite of passage which takes the form of a literal descent and is followed by escape from the cave, is presented in *The Nice and the Good*. Young Pierce Clothier, in love with emotionally frigid Barbara Gray, decides to attract her attention by undertaking an arrogantly bold action. To impress the girl, he plans to sit out the duration of a high tide in Gunnar's Cave. Appealing to their imagination, Gunnar's Cave is a fascinating place where, as the kids, they used to swim to have fun. During the high tide, the sea cavern becomes dangerous because it is filled with water. Pierce was taught to avoid it during the high tide but, influenced by his feelings to Barbara, he is prepared to violate the rule. The plan to explore Gunnar's Cave turns into an obsession, a necessity which starts to overshadow the original purpose of impressing Barbara. Murdoch states that "[i]t was certainly connected with Barbara, but it might be truer to say that the idea of the cave had swallowed up the idea of Barbara" (*The Nice and the Good* 228). Pierce's illusions, cumulating before the entry to the cave and connected with his awakening sexual desire, must be released and dispersed. The critical moment occurs when endangering his own life and the life of Ducane, a family friend, and the dog Mingo who both follow him in, Pierce finally swims into the underwater cave. During the venture he gets trapped and finds it difficult to find a way out. The experience is a turning point for the young man who, due to the proximity of death, realizes its imminence and the true nature of the fantasies engendered by his romantic enchantment.

Another journey to the underground is also depicted in this novel. Ducane is a civil servant who as an amateur undercover detective tries to solve a mystery behind the suicide of a civil service colleague, Joseph Radeechy. His investigation reveals the existence of black magic practitioners with whom Radeechy appears to be connected. To learn more about their practices Ducane descends to the cellars where their occult practices supposedly took place. The cellars are located just below the city surface, under the London office where Radeechy was employed.

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<sup>28</sup> The theme of *katabasis*, which from the Greek literally means 'go down', appears at the opening of Plato's *Republic* when Socrates mentions 'going down' to the port city of Piraeus, located south of his native Athens, which illustrates the fact that Plato was familiar with this convention. Whether or not the convention of *katabasis* influenced his Allegory of the Cave remains an open and interesting question.

In parallel with Pierce's adventure, this escapade may symbolize willingness to explore the irrational nature of the subconscious, by a man who embodies rationality. The dark corridors represent the dark recesses of our minds, the desires and urges which influence our lives on the surface, yet, similarly to the existence of the occult group, are not properly acknowledged or understood. In Murdoch's description the two planes coexist. Stylizing Ducane's journey as an investigation, Murdoch shows how using rational reasoning Ducane tries to penetrate the mysteries hidden below the surface. Juxtaposed by Murdoch, the realm of the underground and the bustling life of the city illustrate how unexpectedly close to our ordinary everyday life the currents of the innate, unrecognized dark powers can flow.

Murdoch thus uses the convention of *katabasis* to illustrate changes in her characters' understanding which are visualized as exploration of underground regions. Following the convention, she emphasises the need to reappear on the surface, thereby leaving the world of irrational desires. Like Orpheus, attempting to bring back Eurydice, Murdoch's characters strive to regain lost contact with reality by confronting the illusions inspired by the irrational, subconscious side which we forget to acknowledge in the overtly rationalized, intellectual climate that Murdoch so masterfully depicts. In addition to these two examples discussed above from *The Nice and the Good* the theme of *katabasis* can be traced in *A Severed Head*, *The Philosopher's Pupil*, *The Italian Girl* and *Henry and Cato*.<sup>29</sup>

In Murdoch's novels the process of discarding false images and achieving a new level of awareness is conveyed by descriptions of physical movement. As the examples provided above illustrate, movement is directed downwards. Numerous examples involving exploration of the underworld can also be juxtaposed with the characters' hasty and often failed attempts to reach a new level of awareness, which is visualized as upward movement, such as climbing up buildings or trees. This theme appears in *The Bell*, when Toby climbs over the Abbey, in *The Sandcastle*, when Donald Mor climbs up the school tower, in *An Unofficial Rose* when Miranda Peronett climbs a tree, and in *The Flight from the Enchanter* when Annette swings on the chandelier. Such attempts to move quickly upwards in order to achieve progress are usually depicted as unsuccessful, because they involve hasty and risky actions and are taken by inexperienced youngsters, who mistake spiritual development, a gradual mental process, for an exciting experience.

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<sup>29</sup> See the article by Francis Mayhew Rippey, "Katabasis in Virgil and Murdoch", which appeared in the tenth issue of *Iris Murdoch Newsletter* in 1996.

The spiritual pilgrimage from illusion to reality may be depicted not only in terms of movement, but also as a journey from darkness towards light, thus involving a gradual alteration of the vision. A transformation involving a symbolic use of images of light appears for instance in *The Italian Girl*. Edmund, the focalizer of the novel, is presented as a pilgrim. He is depicted as being 'on the move'. He is somebody who arrives at the household and affects by his presence the actions of other, previously passive and lethargic inhabitants. His mobility, the fact that he arrives from the 'outside' world, endows him with the most basic quality of a pilgrim – being on the move. The spiritual pilgrimage which awaits him is closely associated with his ability to travel and move freely.

Edmund's return is connected with the necessity of learning more about his family and acknowledging the fact that, although prudish on the outside, he is a man capable of normal human interactions with women. *Katabasis*, in Edmund's case becomes the exploration of family relationships from the past which shaped and still inform his present self, and this process is illustrated by his descent into the world of the Italian girl, the kitchen.

As well as thus depicting Edmund's spatial manoeuvring, Murdoch marks the stages of his transformation with imagery referring to Plato's Cave, namely light and dark. The first scene starts with the image of the night, and the last scene ends with an open door and a promise of the sun. Edmund starts his pilgrimage in darkness, knocking helplessly at the door that remains locked, and he finishes it heading to the sunny light of Italy with Maggie Magistretti. In one of the last scenes he draws his finger along the route of the Via Aurelia, which signalizes some progress made by the character, but also the necessity to continue the journey. He has managed to escape from the darkness enshrouding his childhood house and childhood memories, but he still has a long way to go.

Murdoch illustrates Edmund's progress through the appropriation of imagery echoing the Platonic Allegory. At the beginning of the novel Edmund does not ascribe any particular significance to Maggie. As the housekeeper, almost transparent, unnoticeable, she does not have any visible presence. Force of habit reduces Edmund's apprehension of Maggie to a blurred image: "The moon shone clearly on to my bed and revealed the form of a young girl with long glistening hair. For a moment it seemed like a hallucination, something hollow and incompletely perceived, some conjuration of a tired frightened mind" (*The Italian Girl* 18). Edmund is not capable of recognizing the individuality of Maggie, who for him is just another Italian girl: "Looking up at the remembered face, I felt a sort of temporal giddiness and could

not for a moment make out which one this was, while a series of Giulias and Gemmas and Vittorias and Carlottas moved and merged dreamlike in my mind” (*The Italian Girl* 18). The description of Edmund’s experience suggests that in the protagonist’s mind the girl is not fully realized and comprehended.

The situation changes when, due to his newly discovered affection for the eponymous Italian girl, Edmund starts to perceive her in a different way: “I certainly now, and with a fresh sharpness, saw Maggie as a separate and private and unpredictable being. I endowed her, as it were, with those human rights, the right of secrecy, the right of surprise” (*The Italian Girl* 132). With the loving gaze, involving a deeper understanding of the other, a change in Edmund’s perception occurs: “Maggie had acquired what she had never had before, an exterior. She was no longer invisible. And as I stared in amazement at her metamorphosis I recalled suddenly, poignantly, from some much younger age a figure seen in the radiance of my childhood, a dark, slight tutelary goddess” (*The Italian Girl* 133).

Edmund’s vision is altered when for the very first time he recognizes Maggie’s individuality. Being held by Maggie’s hand and encouraged by her final words, “*Si vedrà. Non aver paura*” (*The Italian Girl* 171), he decides to step out of the cave. With his spiritual awakening, the state of *eikasia* is terminated and the yearning for the sun demonstrates itself: “The Italian words were like a transforming bell. I felt suddenly the heat of the room, the sweet presence of the sun: to live in the sun, to love in the open” (*The Italian Girl* 171).<sup>30</sup> Edmund’s awakened spirit is depicted as being exhilarated by the possibility of leaving the cave and longing for the Good, here represented by the image of the sun, but Murdoch emphasizes that the progress he has made is not the equivalent of the end of the journey: “As I went to the door I paused beside the map of Italy. The route, yes, that too we would have to discuss. I drew my finger along the Via Aurelia. Genova, Pisa, Livorno, Grosseto, Civitavecchia, Roma” (*The Italian Girl* 171).<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Maggie’s words can be translated as: “Let’s go. Do not fear”.

<sup>31</sup> The references to Italy and southern regions typically associated with sunny weather can be found in *An Unofficial Rose* (Randall goes to Rome), *The Book and the Brotherhood* (Rose and Gerard travel to Venice), *Jackson’s Dilemma* (Benet also goes to Venice), *The Flight from the Enchanter* (Annette, travelling in the Orient Express across Europe, is depicted in one of the final scenes as fascinated by a Roman aqueduct, Rosa goes to Italy to meet with Mischa), *Henry and Cato* (Stuart goes to Italy - he will see Vesuvius from his window), and in *The Nice and the Good* (Octavian and Kate go to Petra).

Murdoch renders the changes taking place in Edmund's awareness through the alteration of his vision and the diversification of different sources of light that this character is capable of perceiving. Similarly to Plato's treatment of light, Murdoch emphasizes the distinction between manmade fire and the natural light of the sun. In order to describe the nature of such changes Murdoch introduces a distinction between those various sources of light and presents them as corresponding to the different levels of awareness. Murdoch deploys a wide variety of adjectives to depict the intensity of the light, its nature and influence. The light may be shimmering, glistening or dimmed, but its nature always corresponds to the changes taking place in the character's psyche.

Murdoch's strategy of rendering the nuances of the inner life through images of light is also apparent in her portrayal of Ludwig in *An Accidental Man*. Ludwig is said to burrow himself in the dreamy life in England, far away from real problems awaiting him at home, in the USA. He perceives England as shining with a strange quality of light, which resembles a theatre or television light, therefore, bearing connotations with falsehood and the world of shadows. Murdoch uses images of light reflected by smooth surfaces to indicate that Ludwig's emotional and intellectual state resembles *eikasia*:

Ludwig was living in a daze. Ever since he had become engaged the world had looked completely different. A strange white light shone upon things, like a theatre or television light, so that everything was too bright and a little blanched. This light was not quite itself happiness, though Ludwig had no doubt that he was happy. (*An Accidental Man* 72)

In Murdoch's depiction of the changes taking place in her characters' perception the image of gold plays an important role as the source of mesmerizing light which is introduced to denote susceptibility to the phantasmagorical illusions produced by the Ego. Traditionally, gold is associated with obsessions of many kinds, especially accentuated in the context of the alchemical pursuit. Gold, the object of desire, symbolizes the need to possess and in Murdoch's novels appears to be used in order to illustrate the delusory nature of relationships which fail due to the lack of proper attention or understanding.

Driven by the urge to possess instead of knowing or understanding, characters depicted by means of images of gold engage in the relationships which change their optics. Isabel, obsessed with David Levkin, describes their first meeting in the following way: "It was like a lighting flash and everything becoming golden, like the end of the world. [...] But then when David came, it was a vision of life, it was like seeing an angel, it was like seeing a god" (*The Italian Girl* 108).

In the same novel, Murdoch resorts to the image of gold to portray the nature of unhealthy fantasies. Edmund, perceived by his family as a prude and abstaining from any relations with women, is a person who suppresses his sexuality. The sight of Flora, a pretty girl turning into an attractive woman, awakens in him dormant desires, which he refuses to acknowledge: “The door opened upon the damp sunny jungle of an English summer. Past one corner of the house, where the Virginia creeper hung like light-green cut-out paper upon the blackish-red brick, was visible a triangle of lawn seeming now almost golden in the sun. In the midst of this haze of gold Flora stood, as if she were waiting” (*The Italian Girl* 44).

Gold as a symbol of status and social position has always been associated with royalty. It is an attribute of power and prestige, therefore Murdoch cleverly employs it to render the illusions of grandeur or superiority evinced by some of her more charismatic characters. The images in *The Severed Head* may serve as a case in point. Palmer Anderson and Antonia Lynch-Gibbon, a self-deluding couple and source of power, are viewed by Martin in the following way: “They seemed in that momentary vision of them like deities upon an Indian frieze, enthroned, inhumanly beautiful, a pair of sovereigns, distant and serene” (*A Severed Head* 58). Martin Gibbons, who discovers that his wife is having an affair with his psychoanalyst, perceives them as a pair of gods. Incapable of understanding the real nature of their relationship, he idealizes them and pictures himself as being insignificant and inferior. Immersion in illusion in Murdoch’s fiction is often signalled when the focalizer perceives others as royalty or gods. Descriptions of this kind can be found for instance in *The Nice and the Good* in the description of Octavian and Kate and their golden life-giving egoism, in *An Unofficial Rose* in which Lindsay with her golden hair is compared to Aphrodite of the world of sleep with golden hair (*An Unofficial Rose* 258), or in *The Unicorn*.<sup>32</sup>

In Murdoch’s study of Plato, “The Fire and the Sun”, the image which represents progress mistaken for the actual end of pilgrimage is the image of fire. The meaning which Murdoch ascribes to the fire in Plato’s Allegory of the Cave is explained in her essay in the following way:

The fire, I take it, represents the self, the old unregenerate psyche, the great source of energy and warmth. The prisoners in the second stage of enlightenment have gained the kind of self-awareness which is nowadays a matter of so much interest to us. They can see in themselves the sources of

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<sup>32</sup> Conradi observes that in *The Unicorn*, “an opposition of gold and black, light and dark, fills the story. The words ‘gold’ and ‘golden’ occur some fifty times, and are augmented by yellow, red, fawn, cinnamon, saffron, and amethyst” (*The Saint and the Artist* 161).

what was formerly blind selfish instinct. They see the flames which threw the shadows which they used to think were real, and they can see the puppets, imitations of things in the real world, whose shadows they used to recognize. They do not yet dream that there is anything else to see. What is more likely than that they should settle down beside the fire, which, though its form is flickering and unclear, is quite easy to look at and cosy to sit by? ("The Fire and the Sun" 382-383)

Murdoch here observes that humanity has reached the stage at which people are aware of their natural selfish instincts because we have gained some knowledge about the way that the human psyche works, yet we should not be blinded by this achievement. The problem which must be addressed at this stage lies with the human tendency to fall into self-admiration and a premature complacency.

The significance ascribed to the image of fire in Murdoch's philosophical works and evident in "The Fire and the Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artists" is mirrored in her fiction, where the image of fire is used to illustrate the most common practice of lying to oneself. Denoting a certain misguided convictions of their moral supremacy on the part of her characters, the image of the fire is placed by Murdoch in almost every room, interior or living space inhabited by characters immersed in the inner, shadowy world of dreams produced by the Ego. Take, for instance, the description of a room in *A Severed Head* in which Martin and Antonia Lynch-Gibbon live. The room in which they reside is thus depicted: "A bright fire of coal and wood was glowing and murmuring in the grate, and intermittent lamps lit with a soft gold the long room which even in winter, by some magic of Antonia's, contrived to smell of roses" (*A Severed Head* 21). The room and its atmosphere is further described as follows: "At peace with the world and with myself I breathed the quiet air, lying relaxed and warm in the bright multi-coloured shell which Antonia and I had created, where silk and silver and rosewood, dark mahogany and muted gilt blended sweetly together against a background of Bellini green" (*A Severed Head* 21). The expression "multi-coloured shell" is used to describe both the interior of the apartment the couple have created together as well as their relationship. Although they appear to be happily married, both Antonia and Martin are unfaithful to each other. The image of fire represents the false assumptions and claims which are used to justify the current situation and the choices they make. Take for instance Antonia who engages in a romantic affair with Palmer Anderson, a renowned American psychiatrist. By means of cold reasoning Antonia manages to persuade Martin to accept her offer of a rational and peaceful dissolution of their marriage. Although her actions inflict emotional damage on Martin, she acts as a magnanimous queen offering to her loyal subject the support



needed in this difficult time. Although on the surface her actions are civil and caring, in fact her superficial goodness is ruthlessly stifling Martin's attempts to resist her will. Antonia's peaceful solution turns out to be a passive aggressive strategy, which Martin must recognize as a set of convenient false truths.

Another novel which also employs the use of fire as symbolic of moral hypocrisy is *The Italian Girl*. Isabel lives near the fire both in a literal and in a figurative sense. Kept hostage by her own delusions, she is characterized by means of fiery imagery. She is not afraid of fire. On the contrary, she shows an unhealthy predilection for it, saying: "It's company. Like a dog. I enjoy feeding it" (*The Italian Girl* 30). Isabel represents a whole set of characters, who similarly to her live in a state of denial about the nature of their actions and avoid taking responsibility for the current state of affairs.

The reluctance to face reality is characteristic of all the inhabitants of the household and is expressed through the series of supplications addressed to Edmund by Isabel, Otto and Flora, who all implore Edmund to stay with them and help not only to solve the problem of inheritance left to the Italian Girl, but also to help the others to put in order their messy love lives. The breakthrough moment comes when Elsa, Otto's lover, dies in an accident. When the whole family gathers in Isabel's room, Elsa interrupts the meeting and sets herself on fire: "The heat in the room seemed redoubled, as if we were inside the furnace, and the golden light was everywhere" (*The Italian Girl* 136). Elsa, depicted as promiscuous, earthy, and possibly mentally instable, seems to represent the irrational and unacknowledged side of human nature. She is driven by sensuous appetites and self-delusions, so the fire she instigates and her subsequent death seem to have a cathartic effect on everyone. All the characters involved in the accident go through a purifying ordeal: "We had all been removed to some other plane of being. [...] Something extreme, some truth too appalling to contemplate and yet arrestingly evident had thrust itself through the surface of our lives like a monstrous hump" (*The Italian Girl* 147).

Equally important for Murdoch and equally prevailing in her fiction is the image of the sun, which like the fire is used to describe the characters' progress. She uses the image of the sun to mark the direction of the characters' spiritual development. In Plato's Allegory, the Sun symbolizes the final destination for the knowledge-seeking pilgrims. Synonymous with the Good, the Sun is characterized in *The Republic* as the source of both the value and the existence of all other forms. Comprehension of the Good is unlike other forms of knowing. It

is holistic, not partial. The soul must deliberately work its way up from the lowest level of being to the enlightenment that the Sun stands for. When the mind's eye rests on the objects illuminated by truth, it comprehends them and functions intelligently.

The final destination described by Plato is rarely arrived at in Murdoch's fiction. Instead, she focuses on describing the common problem which her characters encounter on their journey, namely mistaking the light of fire for the Sun. Murdoch warns against this phenomenon in one of her philosophical essays: "The fire may be mistaken for the Sun, and self-scrutiny taken for goodness" ("The Fire and the Sun" 383). Murdoch seems to be convinced that the fire, which represents the psyche, wields the power to allure and entrap us by imitating the Good. She adds, "[t]his powerful thing [fire] is indeed an object of fascination, and those who study its power to cast shadows are studying something which is real. A recognition of its power may be a step towards escape from the cave; but it may equally be taken as an end-point" ("The Fire and the Sun" 383). Murdoch clearly warns her reader that it is easy to be misled into thinking of light and sight as being the sun itself. Knowledge and truth are attributes of the Good which we discover along the way, but neither of them is the Good itself. Murdoch points out that it is easy to become conceited and stop along the way, thinking that the objective of discovering the Good has been achieved. However, this conviction is just an illusion because the Good is beyond reality and superior to it in dignity and power, in other words, it is not that easily attainable.

The image which represents the illusion and the mistaking of the fire for the Sun is that of a sunflower. The image occurs in *The Philosopher's Pupil* when George embarks on a quest to comprehend the teachings of the great metaphysician John Robert Rozanov. George's zeal to understand Rozanov's philosophy is slowly turns into obsession and induces in him a crazed state of a temporary blindness. After his attempt to murder the philosopher, George stares at the sun, the Platonic image of the truth, and describes his unravelling vision in the following way:

It was no longer round but was becoming shaped like a star with long jagged mobile points which kept flowing in and out, and each time they flowed they became of a dazzling burning intensity. The star was very near, too near. It went on flaming and burning, a vast catastrophic conflagration in the evening sky, emitting its long jets of flame. And as it burnt with dazzling pointed rays a dark circle began to grow in its centre, making the star look like a sunflower. (*The Philosopher's Pupil* 539-540)

The image of a sunflower, used as a misleading substitute for the Good, was earlier introduced by Murdoch in *Under the Net*. Dave Gellman is a practitioner of analytic linguistic philosophy, described in the following way: “Dave is an old friend, but he’s a philosopher, not the kind that tells you about your horoscope and the number of the beast, but a real one like Kant and Plato, so of course he has no money” (*Under the Net* 24). Dave is compared to the Sun, and his pupils, basking in the light of his knowledge, are compared to sunflowers: “Dave’s pupils adore him, but there is a permanent fight on between him and them. They aspire like sunflowers. They are all natural metaphysicians, or so Dave says in a tone of disgust. [...] He blazes upon them with the destructive fury of the sun, but instead of shrivelling up their metaphysical pretensions he achieves merely their metamorphosis from one rich state into another” (*Under the Net* 27). The image of the sunflower represents an advanced stage of development, yet, at the same time, it is used to denote the danger of premature satisfaction with one’s achievements. As Johnson aptly points out of Iris Murdoch’s novels, “[t]here is always the possibility [...] that the pilgrim’s sense of his quest may turn out to be yet another illusion, another gratifying fiction” (6).

Murdoch presents the moment of turning away from the fire as the rejection of appearances and images fabricated by the psyche. No longer surrounded by the artificial products of imagination, with no veil, no fabric preventing the eyes from seeing clearly, the prisoners become stripped of the fantasies. Murdoch seems to play with the notion of mental progress as taking off the enslaving shackles of the subconscious. When in *An Accidental Man*, Gracie Tisbourne experiences a small epiphany, she is portrayed as rejecting constraining layers, here associated with illusion, by undressing:

She began to take off her clothes, her dress fell from her. She stood there white and lithe as a boy, compact and dense, an arrow, a flame. Still in the midst of fear, she began to walk springily across the grass. If she could but keep this visitation pure and whole some greatness would come to be, if she could but cover this precarious space, and lay her hands upon the tree she would be filled with angelic power, the world would be filled with it. (*An Accidental Man* 345)

Murdoch here presents the experience of dispersing illusions and approaching the Good as the rejection of the layers of self-imposed lies. But, as this passage illustrates, what is hidden underneath takes the form of ‘a flame’.

The analysis of Murdoch’s use of imagery reveals that she strives to create meaningful and dynamic duos of darkness and light, water and fire, to saturate her narratives with

Platonic thought. If the light of the fire symbolizes the Ego and its magnetic force, water is an image that Murdoch uses to neutralize its devastating influence. The images of darkness and the sun are used to illustrate the progress made by the characters. In addition to using images that appear in Plato's Allegory, Murdoch invents her own, which are her creative response to Plato's influential original. The images like gold or the sunflower all serve the purpose of translating Plato's metaphorical language into her own vision. These images, though scattered across the novels and evolving with the development of her literary career, are organized so as to resemble Plato's model and have the potential to connect her stories of troubled individuals to Plato's metaphysics.

### **I.5 The role of violence in the process of leaving the Cave**

Murdoch illustrates changes taking place in her characters' consciousness by introducing a gradual improvement of their ability to see properly. The awakening, the recognition of psyche's deceptions, is invariably manifested by the use of significant images. In this subchapter it will be contended that in her depiction of such changes Murdoch often preserves the feeling of discomfort accompanying the transformation, which converges with Plato's representation of the process in his Allegory. Furthermore, it will be argued that violence and images of violence constitute an essential element of the transformation, which Murdoch renders in accordance with the description of the process in Plato's dialogue.

In Plato's text Socrates describes the moment of prisoners' confrontation with a new source of light in the following way: "See what will naturally follow if the prisoners are released and disabused of their error. At first, when any of them is liberated and compelled suddenly to stand up and turn his neck round and walk and look towards the light, he will suffer sharp pains; the glare will distress him" (*The Republic* 178). The process of turning away from the wall of shadows and experiencing the new reality is described by Plato as particularly painful and discomfoting.

In his analysis of Murdoch's novels Donald Emerson observes that violence is one of the prevailing themes in her fiction. He notices that:

Outward violence in Miss Murdoch's work ranges from simple theft to murder or suicide on the scale of action, from impulse to premeditation on the scale of intention, from accident to catastrophe within the workings of nature; but the inward violence of aggression,

subjugation, and enslavement is frequently far more interesting than any outward event, as is the inward struggle for freedom. (24)

Emerson argues that a certain “progression of violence” from casual, merry violence in *Under the Net*, to more consequential acts like suicide or murder in her later novels is visible (25). About the themes of violence and survival in her novels he concludes:

They are centrally related to her conception of the human condition, and despite her respect for a contingent world and irreducible persons Miss Murdoch seems increasingly drawn to the symbolic novel in which emphasis on violence and suffering is greater than in portrayals in the realistic mode. (Emerson 28)

Emerson’s interpretation and classification of violence in Murdoch’s novels puts both, deliberate human acts and some random accidents, which, in the case of Murdoch’s fiction are often entwined, into one category. I agree that violence in Murdoch’s novels is connected to her view of human beings immersed in the contingent world, but I presume that it is also connected to Murdoch’s ideas concerning human nature, driven by the dark impulses of the psyche and entrapped in the cave of illusions.

Murdoch’s embracing of Plato’s drastic vision and the violent nature of the changes that occur along the intellectual pilgrimage can be illustrated by the description of the shock suffered by Martin in *A Severed Head*:

The task of peering through the mist was becoming exasperating and painful. I cannot see, I cannot see, I said to myself: it was as if some inner blindness were being here tormentingly exteriorized. I saw shadows and hints of things, nothing clearly at all [...] Like one of Köhler’s apes, my cluttered mind attempted to connect one thing with another. Very dimly and distantly, but hugely, it began to dawn upon me what the nature of my ailment was. It was something new and something, as I even then at once apprehended, terrible. (*A Severed Head* 122)

An important part of Murdoch’s depiction of the changes taking place in her characters’ consciousness is the preservation of the drastic aspect of the whole process as described by Plato. Similarly to the proceedings described in the Allegory, the changes in her characters’ consciousness may be induced forcefully, and are rarely the result of the characters’ conscious efforts to improve. In Murdoch’s fiction the cave dweller is usually pushed to achieve a new level of awareness by some violent event or by other characters personifying the violence inscribed in the process of discarding old ways of thinking.

Transition from one level of awareness to another is neither a peaceful nor a natural process. On the opposite, it is often prompted and provoked. The role of the catalysts

inspiring the changes in the outlook is particularly important, but has not yet been extensively discussed with reference to Plato's ideas. In contrast with Murdoch's power figures and enchanters who offer some kind of illusory consolation, these powerfully liberating characters arrive to facilitate the process of discarding false images. These catalytic figures who resort to violence should not be mistaken for 'psychopomps'. Conradi explains the role of the psychopomp in the following way: "Since a common form of illusion is to imagine that you are more virtuous than you really are, the psychopomp, who acts, however unwittingly, as tantric master reconnecting the novice with the real, can sometimes speak with an apparent worldliness" (*The Saint and the Artist* 65).<sup>33</sup>

Neither exemplary teachers nor enchanters lifting the spell, the *agents provocateurs* who induce changes using violent means, constitute a separate category within Murdoch's splendid assemblage of different character types. Take for instance the role of Constance Pinn in *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* who acts as an *agent provocateur* and has a profound effect on the spiritual development of David Gavender, the son of the protagonist, Blaise. David is portrayed as rebelling against the smothering affection of his mother and father, yet as relying on their love and moral guidance. When the truth about his father's unfaithfulness is revealed, David's mental stability is visibly threatened: "How can I bear it, he thought, how can I go on bearing it without becoming something savage and awful" (*The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* 199). A need for some violent action becomes pressing, something he has never known before:

Last night he had dreamt he was in China. In a wild mountain landscape he had seen, up a steep path, a wooden cistern fed by a warm spring. In the thick creamy water a naked girl was bathing. Then suddenly with horror he had seen the mountain shudder and begin to move. With increasing speed a great roaring avalanche was beginning to descend. (*The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* 232)

This ominous dream betrays his mental state and its symbolism points towards some sort of a 'disaster', a permanent moral damage which may await him. David's dream turns out to be prophetic because in *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* Murdoch provides us with the picture of an adolescent boy who, tormented by a moral crisis, has to resist the temptation put in front of him by Pinn. Pinn, who works in an all-girls school, tempts David to disengage from his moral conscience by confronting him with female nudity. She leads David to a large

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<sup>33</sup> The term 'psychopomp' was coined by Malcolm Bradbury and is used in "'A House Fit for Free Characters': Iris Murdoch and *Under the Net*", in *Possibilities: Essays on the State of the Novel* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp.231-46.

garden surrounded by high brick walls where he is given a chance to spy on bathing girls:

A whitish marble basin, half sunk in the grass, filled with water and with the area of a fair-sized swimming pool, lay in the foreground with, rising up behind it, an immense and very battered baroque fountain representing Poseidon surrounded by sea nymphs. In the marble basin, as lithe and pink as fishes, six or seven girls were disporting themselves. They were all entirely naked. (*The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* 236)

Put in a difficult position, the boy hides in the rose bushes, and momentarily gets overwhelmed by the scent of the roses and by adrenaline. He is brought to his senses by the pain caused by a thorn hurting his arm. Physical pain makes him realize that his actions are utterly inappropriate. Smeared with blood, David escapes instead of indulging in the scene: “His flesh was blazing hot. He felt confused violent emotion. Shame. Terror. Wild joy” (*The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* 239). Despite his confusion, by refusing to become a lewd spectator David preserves his innocence.

Pinn, who tempts him to go astray, tests his moral judgement and performs the role of a meddler. She is described with a reference to a traditionally ambiguous character in English literature, namely Puck. Pinn, a secondary character in the dynamic of the novel, is diminished and shunned by other characters. She appears to be a person who ‘facilitates’ communication because she gathers gossip, moves around and stirs affairs, but her own story is not given enough attention; even though it is more tragic than the plot of romance that occupies the centre of the novel, it is condensed and reduced to an anecdote. Initially presented as a Puckish spirit and a testing force, after David’s successful resistance to her temptation she is transformed and gains substance, of which she was initially deprived by the structure of the novel itself. Pinn is characterized as follows: “The green-eyed face seemed to be transforming itself before him into a beautiful mask of pure gaze” (*The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* 321).

Pinn epitomizes the ambivalent force, neither good nor bad, which guides the character towards self-realization. The similar role of ambiguous catalyst is ascribed to Miranda, in *An Unofficial Rose*. This young girl is depicted as manipulative, often seen as playing with dolls, which symbolizes her active involvement with the lives of people surrounding her. Miranda, although only a teenager, does not abstain from resorting to drastic measures in order to achieve her personal goal. She intervenes in her parents’ romantic lives, which leads to the break-up of their marriage, in order to get closer to the man she secretly loves. “She was as a

green sprite, something composed out of the green water light of England” (*An Unofficial Rose* 47). By identifying her with “a green sprite” Murdoch introduces a meaningful reference to the Shakespearean character, but also another fictional green sprite, namely Peter Pan, invented by J.M. Barrie: “Miranda had always seemed younger than her age, and yet managed to combine her Peter Pannish demeanour with a knowingness which made Hugh sometimes conjecture that it was all a sort of masquerade” (*An Unofficial Rose* 22).<sup>34</sup> Both references enhance Miranda’s role as a clever, but possibly immature and morally ambiguous instigator.

Another character who falls into the category of a catalyst for change, the powerful yet ambivalent force which offers escape from illusion through drastic measures, may be Mir in *The Green Knight*. The plot of *The Green Knight* reworks the Middle English poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Leeson observes that Mir, the character evocative of the Green Knight, is not only a member of the Green Party, but is often depicted as possessing green items of clothing (123). Apart from being connected with mythological Green Knight, Mir figures as the embodiment of Christ. According to Leeson: “He [Mir] is either a malevolent force of disruption (for Lucas), or an emerging source of good that pre-empts change (for Clement and Moy)” (126). A similar observation is made by Conradi: “Peter Mir, the book’s errant ambiguous moral force, or an unofficial wandering angel, has many roles to play and a long pedigree within Murdoch’s *oeuvre*” (*The Saint and the Artist* 359). Being the chief agent mediating in the romantic adventures of other characters, Mir reminds us of Puck. Lisa Fiander observes in *Fairy Tales and the Fiction of Iris Murdoch, Margaret Drabble and A.S. Byatt*: “The fact that Peter Mir, a mysterious Russian gentleman whose influence causes many of the romances in the novel to blossom, is revealed at the end of *The Green Knight* to be an escaped mental patient, also introduces irony into the fairy-tale unions that end Murdoch’s novel” (37). Apart from this matchmaking role evoking the workings of Puck and Eros, and his moral ambivalence, Mir, similarly to Miranda and Pinn, figures in a violent scene in which he takes a deadly blow from Lucas Graffe who is attempting to kill his brother Clement. Involving himself in the fight between the two Graffe brothers, Mir becomes a central figure for Lucas’s further development. Lucas, a dark Byronic figure, is forced by Mir to

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<sup>34</sup> Peter Conradi points out that on account of their immature spirituality many men in Murdoch’s novels of the 1970s are associated with Peter Pan, ‘the sinister boy’ (Conradi 1986: 81). The motif of Peter Pan appears in *An Accidental Man*, *A Word Child*, and *The Sea, the Sea*. For further details see an excellent chapter on Peter Pan in Cheryl Bove Browning’s and Anne Rowe’s *Sacred Space, Beloved City: Iris Murdoch’s London* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008).



acknowledge his crime in front of his closest circle of friends. Furthermore, Mir demands from Lucas a dramatic re-enactment of the drastic scene a year later, which eventually becomes a healing ritual for Lucas.

Murdoch's depiction of such *agents provocateurs* which includes intertextual reference to Shakespeare allows us to understand those characters better. Puck, the green sprite appearing in *A Midsummer's Night's Dream*, is based on the ancient figure of Puck found in English mythology. According to Robert Bell in *Shakespeare's Great Stage of Fools* Puck is a clever, mischievous elf who is "the primary denizen of disorder" (16). Bell observes that "Puck has become much more than a gopher and a go-between: he links fairies and mortals, connects 'real' and supernatural realms" (19). Harold Bloom in his study of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* also observes that Puck is "always uncannily *between*, between men and women, faeries and humans, nobles and mechanicals, nature and art, space and time" (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* 207). Bloom explains that "Puck is a spirit cheerfully amoral [...]" (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* 207) and describes Puck as "an agent of the irrational element in love" (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* 207). Puck's role as a mediator displaying certain moral ambivalence and influencing other characters' love life is also pointed out by Peter Holland in the Introduction to *The Oxford Shakespeare: A Midsummer Night's Dream*: "But his [Puck's] dramatic function aligns him closely with Cupid in the play's mythological schema, the spirit responsible for creating irrational affection and the one responsible for transforming it into a harmonious and socially acceptable desire" (41).

It may be assumed that the role played by Puck in Shakespeare's play is artistically recreated by Murdoch and linked to Platonic thought, especially to the concept of Eros. Bearing a resemblance to Eros, the powerful force capable of inducing changes, in Murdoch's fiction Puck-like characters seem to bring other characters in the novel closer to their subconscious side, thus helping them to purify their selfish desires.

Murdoch's fascination with Shakespeare is widely acknowledged. Apart from Conradi (*The Saint and the Artist* 18), also Rui Bertrand Romao ("Iris Murdoch and the Rethinking of Shakespeare as a Philosopher" 45), Maria Antonaccio (*A Philosophy to Live By* 199) and Kum Kum Bajaj (*A Critical Study of Iris Murdoch's Fiction* 49) all testify to Murdoch's admiration for the Bard's work. Richard Todd, in *Iris Murdoch: The Shakespearian Interest*, discusses *The Midsummer Night's Dream* and its relation to Murdoch's fiction in his fifth chapter devoted to power and enchantment. Todd focuses on the resemblance of Julius King, a character from *A Fairly Honorable Defeat*, to Shakespeare's Oberon. He observes that

“characters in dotage can be manipulated easily; in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* Oberon assigns this role to Puck, who in fact comes to enact the capricious behaviour of Cupid” (101). Apart from mentioning this link between Cupid and Puck in Shakespeare’s work, Murdoch’s appropriation of the character to embody Eros is not discussed by Todd.

In Murdoch’s fiction characters who provoke violent acts often perform a very ambiguous role. This role may be associated with the workings of Eros, the morally-ambivalent energy that is linked to both destruction and love. A violent event may be a reason why characters retreat to caves of their own making, but it may also serve as a means of escaping them. Take for instance the consequences of a tragic accident described in *The Book and the Brotherhood*. When Jean Cambus falls in love with Crimond, Duncan, her jealous husband, throws a fit and engages in a fight with Crimond. The fight, which takes place in a tower, ends tragically when Crimond punches Duncan in the eyes so hard that he falls back and tumbles all the way down the spiral staircase. This fight and his subsequent defeat leave an emotional scar on Duncan who starts to obsess over Crimond’s role in his life. His immersion in delusion is symbolically presented through Duncan’s ensuing loss of sight. We learn that after the fight something frightful happened to his eyes: “The pain was extreme, but worse than the pain was the sense that both were injured, and one of the precious orbs actually crushed [...] The centre of his field of vision seemed to have disappeared and the periphery was full of grey bubbling atoms” (*The Book and the Brotherhood* 89). Both his mutilated condition and the shame of his defeat are concealed by Duncan, who waits several years to get his revenge. As is the case with other symbolic acts of violence in Murdoch’s fiction, it takes an equally dramatic re-enactment of the fight to free Duncan from his obsession.

For Murdoch violence seems to be an indispensable element of leaving the Cave, but the correlation between her depiction of violent scenes and Plato’s Allegory is not always explicitly stated by scholars. In his insightful analysis of *A Severed Head*, Conradi characterizes Honor Klein, a sword-wielding powerful character who helps Martin to detach from his world of fantasies, as having “ambiguous spiritual power” and calls her “a conqueror of self-deception” (*The Saint and the Artist* 119). However, the use of violence, the painful ordeal which she administers is not described as evocative of the proceedings presented by Plato in his Allegory of the Cave. The element of pain and shock which links Murdoch’s plots with Plato’s model is missing from many interpretations. Apart from Conradi, one may mention Byatt’s interpretation of the same novel. Her reading acknowledges the agency of Honor as introducing Martin to the higher state of awareness and personifying “a vaster and

vaguer and more general truth” (*Degrees of Freedom* 118). But Byatt does not explicitly state that the violence embodied by Honor may directly be linked to Plato’s Allegory and the prisoner’s education. Instead, Byatt links Honor to Lawrentian dark gods and interprets her actions in the frame of Freudian psychoanalysis (*Degrees of Freedom* 128). Honor’s role, however, so similar to that of other Murdochian catalysts administering awakening blows, allows us to conclude that she personifies Eros. Like Pinn and Mir, Honor is described with significant reference to the colour green:

She still looked tired and some characters of recent suffering were written on her face. But the demon was awake again. She looked round the room a little, pushed her overcoat off on the back of her chair, dug her hands deep into the pockets of her green suit, crossed her hands and returned to watching me. (*A Severed Head* 203)

Murdoch’s appropriation of the imagery introduced by Plato in his *Allegory of the Cave* allows her to create a rich matrix of images that link her fiction with Plato’s philosophical thought. Although Murdoch preserves the majority of images used by Plato, she also introduces a few modifications to his model. The first and main difference is that in his Allegory the enlightened individual, after his successful escape from the cave and instructive investigation of the reality outside, returns to his fellow-prisoners and attempts to share with them what he learned. His awakening takes place regardless of the others, and his fellow prisoners appear only in the context of the potential danger and ignorance they represent. Murdoch, on the other hand, presents the prisoners of the cave as co-dependent. The presence of other human beings is a necessary condition for proceeding in spiritual development because only by acknowledging the presence of the other are we really capable of fighting back our natural and narcissistic instincts. The active role of the catalysts who personify the powerful Eros and forcefully induce changes also suggests that the process of escaping illusion is inherently social. Although spiritual and cognitive metamorphosis takes place in the consciousness of an individual, the presence of the other is indispensable as a trigger for change.

### **I.6 The limits of human cognition: the Murdochian balance between discarding illusion and preserving myth**

The examples provided in the previous subchapters allow us to conclude that Murdoch presents characters undergoing a mental and spiritual change as evolving from a non-critical preoccupation with illusions to a more conscious discarding of these misleading pictures. Conradi draws attention to the fact that this transformation constitutes a continuing theme in

Murdoch's work and he emphasizes that it is essentially Platonic (*The Saint and the Artist* 39). The opposite process to the discarding of illusions is the process of making and creating them, which Murdoch calls myth-making. The following sub-section of this chapter focuses on the precarious balance between the Platonic imperative to discard false images and a need to rely on inadequate myths which is inscribed in Murdoch's fiction and which constitutes an informative comment on our ability to escape from the Cave of illusion.

The most basic definition states that myth is a type of story, typically concerned with the origins of the world, the active role of gods and goddesses, heroes and heroines, and, finally, set in some timeless past. Myth is considered to be a sacred form of narrative which holds religious or spiritual significance for those who tell it. In Murdoch's understanding myths are forms of narration which most adequately capture the nuances of our inner lives so deeply influenced by the Ego. Murdoch comments on our mythmaking tendencies in the following way: "The mythical is not something 'extra': we live in myth and symbol all the time" ("Mass, Might and Myth" 191). Conradi explains Murdoch's understanding of the role of myth thus:

The novelist must use myth and magic to help liberate us from myth and magic, an enterprise which, since both writer and client are frail and human, can never be more than minutely successful [...] We are all symbol makers, myth-makers, story-tellers, she repeatedly asserted. Art is, as it were, the ordinary human condition, and not (or not merely) the peculiar task and property of a vain crew of specialists. (*The Saint and the Artist* 29)

As individuals we strive to gain knowledge and understanding which is often organized in the form of narrative, the quality of which closely resembles myth. Compared with a naturalistic picture of reality, our personal, mythopoeic version of reality is a fanciful and wishful vision appealing to our desires.

In his analysis of the role of myth in Murdoch's novels Conradi draws attention to the negative aspect of our mythmaking practice and claims that:

Myth opposes particularity, history and contingency because it digests all of them, bullying the plural into singular. It is a vehicle of monism of a premature and shallow kind. Both growing up and paying attention are for Murdoch matters of struggling to perceive the world with less preconception, and to understand the provisionality of life-myths which lead us to repeat roles in emotional systems whose patterns are laid down early. (*The Saint and the Artist* 104-105)

In Murdoch's fiction the validity of a personal myth is often questioned through the use of repetition. The act of destroying myths that prevent us from a proper apprehension of reality

takes place by breaking away from their narrative structure. Conradi observes that “[t]he single most notable feature of Murdoch’s plots is that they frequently concern an action that recurs” (*The Saint and the Artist* 97).<sup>35</sup> Life, unlike narrative, does not follow any rules, so any attempt to inscribe it into the formulaic structure of myth must inevitably fail. Murdoch captures the essence of this phenomenon depicting characters who strive for dramatic resolution, but never experience a symbolically rich breakthrough. Take for instance the depiction of Hilary Burde in *A Word Child*. Hilary holds himself responsible for the death of his lover Anne Jopling. The tragic accident in which he was involved leaves him with a great emotional scar which, he believes, may only be removed by earning forgiveness from his former friend, Anne’s husband, Gunnar Jopling. Gunnar, also traumatized by the death of his wife, ascribes, like Hilary, a tremendously symbolical importance to Hilary’s role in the accident. Hilary’s involvement in the accident thus makes him play a strange, yet important role in the life of Gunnar and his new wife, Kitty, who tells Hilary, “You’ve been a sort of huge mythological figure to both of us for years, you’ve been *there*, behind everything. You’ve been a sort of fate – or a kind of awful – god – in our lives – or a huge ghost” (*A Word Child* 193). Despite the fact that the two men seemingly move on with their lives, they are both stuck in the past and yearn to find real closure.

Lady Kitty Jopling, Gunnar’s second wife, aware that both men need psychological relief, arranges a long awaited meeting, but unfortunately she dies in an accident, which aborts their attempted reconciliatory meeting. The circumstances of her death, so ominously reminiscent of Anne’s death, provoke Hilary’s musings on the nature of both accidents, which summarize the novel’s message on the role of myth in the whole process: “I wanted some sort of soothing experience, some sort of symbolic reassurance, I wanted him to say, ‘It’s all right, Hilary, it’s all right’” (*A Word Child* 288). Kitty’s accidental death robs the two men of their awaited closure and mocks their aspirations to become reconciled in a great symbolic way. Murdoch resorts to the cycle of repetition to illustrate that any attempt to turning life into an aesthetically pleasing structure may be misleading. Conradi states that “[f]or Murdoch’s characters, unlike James Joyce’s, history is a nightmare from which they are unable fully to awake, since the unenlightened personality itself is a blind realm of repetition and substitution” (*The Saint and the Artist* 98). Conradi calls Murdoch’s plot “a device for

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<sup>35</sup>The theme of recurrence is extensively discussed by Bran Nicol in *Iris Murdoch: The Retrospective Fiction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: Palgrave, Macmillan, 2004).

humiliating those who wish to contain experience or to abstract it” (*The Saint and the Artist* 99). The degree to which myth must and can be eliminated and discarded is a question which echoes through Murdoch’s novels. As Conradi points out, in Murdoch’s fiction the act of breaking false images is valued positively, but her numerous examples of too prompt and radical acts of iconoclasm show that it may be potentially disastrous: “Becoming good may very well involve a slow ‘jettisoning of imagery’ and a breaking of patterns. When others perform these acts of iconoclasm for us, or when we perform them ourselves too fast, the breakage can be malign. It depends on who you are; and how situated” (*The Saint and the Artist* 81).

Examples of characters who invest too much time and energy in chasing phantoms are undoubtedly easy to spot in Murdoch’s fiction. Demythologisation as the main objective and characteristic of modern times is emphasized in many of her novels, like *The Time of the Angels*, *Henry and Cato*, *The Good Apprentice* and finally *The Book and the Brotherhood*. However, in all of these novels she seems to be suggesting that the imperative of rejecting constraining myths must be achieved in a sensible and cautious way, because the destruction of all myths and false images may be as dangerous to our moral life as the life filled with illusions. The examples of Tamar Hernshaw in *The Book and the Brotherhood*, Cato Forbes in *Henry and Cato* or Edward in *The Good Apprentice* demonstrate Murdoch’s belief that myth may play a crucial role in the process of healing. Tamar, an intelligent and academically-gifted young girl, experiences a mental breakdown following an abortion and in order to put her life back on track she reaches for myths provided by a Christian Priest, Father McAlister. Being well-educated, she initially feels that reliance on stories derived from religious texts which offer a distorted picture of reality is similar to cheating: “Tamar was perfectly aware of her cleverness, was even ready to accuse herself of ‘cheating’” (*The Book and the Brotherhood* 490). However, in the time of despair she decides to embrace these consoling myths because they offer her the psychological comfort she needs: “Tamar did her best to live into it, at first simply in escaping from hell, later in practicing what seemed an entirely new kind of calmness [...] Was this religious magic or merely psychological magic?” (*The Book and the Brotherhood* 490).

In Murdoch’s novels the myth-making practice which infuses the picture of reality with symbols is juxtaposed with another means of processing reality, namely building a theory. A great number of books and manuscripts, which appear in Murdoch’s fiction, may be interpreted as manifestations of characters’ attempts to understand and analyse reality by

building comprehensive theories. Those works, often presented in the process of their making, aspire to become ground-breaking theoretical pieces. Take for instance Rupert Foster's manuscript on morality in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* or Rozanov's final philosophical treatise in *The Philosopher's Pupil*. Hardly ever completed, such theoretical writings become torn up, get lost or even rejected by the author himself, who after thorough revision realizes his failure to deliver a study of the finest quality.

One of the most memorable theoreticians who illustrates the significance ascribed by Murdoch to the process of building a theory is Crimond in *The Book and the Brotherhood*. Crimond is an Oxford graduate and the only member of the group informally called the Brotherhood who is said to retain the extreme left-wing idealism they all used to share as students. He is a notorious theorist who decides to write a book which is supposed to explain comprehensively the nature of the social and political changes that shape the world: "He declared, in a speech unintelligible to his young audience who had never read Kipling, that now, like Mowgli, he would 'hunt alone in the forest'" (*The Book and the Brotherhood* 101).

His zeal to create a theoretical masterpiece which would revolutionize the way people think corresponds to his other interests. Crimond is a Romantic idealist who likes Greek and Latin poems, Dante and Pushkin. He is fascinated by guns, which he collects and which may symbolize his proneness to 'hunt' for ideas, but also the need for drastic change which he advocates. Crimond believes that: "It can't be like that, we have to go through the fire, in an oppressive society only violence is honest. Men are half alive now, in the future they'll be puppets" (*The Book and the Brotherhood* 296).

Crimond's perspective is said to resemble the disposition of the ancient Greeks, who were dignified and superstitious. It is observed that, similarly to Greek heroes, Crimond lacks tolerance for human flaws and sense of humour. Crimond is a purist who displays strong demythologising tendencies, openly criticising the condition of the society in which he lives, especially its moral and religious hypocrisy. He says, "We are fat with false morality and inwardness and authenticity and decayed Christianity" (*The Book and the Brotherhood* 174). Keen on finding fault with surrounding reality, he remains oblivious of his own shortcomings. Using Murdoch's reinterpretation of Plato's Allegory of the Cave, we may conclude that Crimond manages to turn away from the wall of shadows, but becomes mesmerized by the blazing fire of his own idealism and righteousness.

After years of strenuous research Crimond manages to complete his book: “It’s not just another book about political theory, it’s a *synthesis*, it’s immensely long, it’s about everything” (*The Book and the Brotherhood* 559). He is convinced that the book contains a verbalized essence of human existence, the truth that may save the civilization from a slow decay. The completion of his *magnum opus* leaves Crimond with a sense of emptiness, which eventually turns into an obsession with death. He even persuades Jean, his lover, to attempt to commit mutual suicide, which, like the completion of his book, would immortalize their perfect communion.

It seems that with the inception of his great theory, the significance of everything else withers dramatically. However, Crimond’s attitude changes when he accidentally shoots his friend Jenkin Riderhood, the only person whom he truly admires. Jenkin’s violent and pointless death breaks the spell of romantic illusion which governs Crimond’s life and forces him to rethink his stance in life. Even though Crimond’s masterpiece, an eloquent and fascinating book, is finally released, the death of his friend makes him realize that his theory is a fraud. The absurdity of his friend’s death encourages Crimond to continue his humble and strenuous work of searching for the truth.

Crimond’s misguided, but productive theory-making has the potential to influence people in his surroundings. Crimond’s idealism and his striving to change society is presented against the background of the unproductive theorising indulged in by the Brotherhood. The Brotherhood is depicted as criticising Crimond and fearing his ideas, but their reactions to Crimond take only the form of accusations and concerns expressed verbally among themselves: “Crimond hates the idea of the individual, he hates the idea of being incarnate, he’s a puritan, he’s not a bit romantic, he’s something new and awful” (*The Book and the Brotherhood* 225).

The completion of Crimond’s book positively affects Gerard Hernshaw, the unofficial leader of the Brotherhood, who, upon reading Crimond’s work, becomes inspired to pursue his own intellectual development. Gerard announces that he also wants to write a book, but instead of going for a translation of Horace or study of Plato or Plotinus, or Dante, he wants to write an intellectual philosophical novel. Before the publication of Crimond’s book, Gerard was dedicated to the effortless life and remained satisfied with his high moral standards:

Gerard was not at home, made continually restless by a glimpsed ideal far, far above him; yet at the same time the glimpse, as the clouds swirled about the summit, consoled him, even deceived him, as with a



swoop of intellectual love he seemed to be beside it, up there in those pure and radiant regions, high above the thing he really was. (*The Book and the Brotherhood* 132)

Although Crimond's book is viewed by its author as an incomplete theory, the transformation of Gerard suggests that even a flawed or misguided work like that may spur the dormant curiosity of the reader, thus contributing to the growth of civilization.

The circulation of ideas in the novel as related to the production of theoretical works is presented as an extension of dialectical debate. The passiveness of Gerald juxtaposed with Crimond's productivity provokes the question of the moral responsibility of those who feel, understand and think. The current situation, in which those capable of contributing to the discourse remain detached and disheartened from the active reshaping and reforming of society, is depicted as pitiful: "Learned people, intellectuals, have lost their confidence, their kind of protest is being esoteric. And at the other end it's smashing things. There's a gap where the theories ought to be, where the *thinking* ought to be" (*The Book and the Brotherhood* 243). By juxtaposing these two thinkers Murdoch seems to suggest that "[p]erhaps misguided moral passion is better than confused indifference" (*The Book and the Brotherhood* 244).

In Murdoch's novels effort and active engagement in producing a theory or analysis is presented as an important component of the moral life, the importance of which can be further illustrated by Peter Saward. In her second novel, *The Flight from the Enchanter*, Murdoch introduces the character of Peter, who is portrayed as working on a linguistic theory. Peter, a historian of the empires which rose and fell before Babylon, is obsessed with deciphering the mysterious Kastanic script, inscribed on a tablet discovered in Syria. Although he devotes his life to this research, he is never rewarded with finding the final answer. At the end of the novel he has to accept the sad truth that his research has all been in vain, because a bilingual tablet discovered near Tarsus proves his ideas to have been wrong. Peter comments on his unsuccessful attempt to solve the mystery in the following way: "One reads the signs as best one can, and one may be totally misled. But it's never certain that the evidence will turn up that makes everything plain" (*The Flight from the Enchanter* 287).

Murdoch's depiction of mythmaking and theory-making practices brings us to the question of whether escape from the Cave is even possible, not to mention desirable, for her characters. In her debut novel, *Under the Net*, we find two statements on the role of theory in our existence, which precede and summarize the problem of the tricky balance between the

myth-making tendency and the myth-discarding objective as outlined by Murdoch. Two fictional characters, Tamarus and Annandine, who appear in a dialogue written by Jake the first-person narrator, are involved in a dispute about the role of theory. Tamarus claims that “[w]e are rational animals in the sense of theory making animals” (*Under the Net* 91). Annandine, on the other hand, states that “All theorizing is flight. We must be ruled by the situation itself and this is unutterably particular” (*Under the Net* 91).

The first statement expresses a belief in our natural penchant for theory-making, understood here as an intellectual effort to impose order. The second sentence emphasizes the fact that the theories we create tend to be faulty and inaccurate, inherently incapable of embracing the complexity of the reality they describe. The conclusion which can be drawn from this debate as well as from the representation of our mythmaking and theory-building practices in Murdoch’s later novels is that any forms of theory-making are better than quasi-enlightened intellectual apathy. Mythmaking practice, in the context of Murdoch’s retrieval of the Platonic model, is just a coping mechanism, a very imperfect interpretation of reality, but it is a tangible proof of the effort to understand it. Compared with Plato’s unwavering faith in human rational capacities, Murdoch presents in her novels a more realistic approach towards the limits of cognition. As Conradi observes, “Murdoch is wholly of our time in her insistence that ‘truth’ cannot be secured. There are short glimpses of clarity and insight, but the single Big Truth is always illusory. Conceptual mastery falsifies, and all strategies of possession are mocked by time” (*The Saint and the Artist* 372). Plato’s idealistic ambition of getting rid of all illusions and false pictures is replaced in her fiction with a form of compromise allowing reliance on myths, especially in times of need, and acknowledging the effort put into producing incomplete or straightforwardly mistaken theories. Although mythmaking may threaten our intellectual development and theory-building is almost always doomed to fail, these two modes of processing reality are indispensable mechanisms that allow us to respond to the complexity of reality.

### **I.7 Similarities between Plato’s use of metaphor in *The Republic* and Murdoch’s writing style employing metaphorical imagery**

In this final sub-section of the chapter it will be argued that Murdoch’s writing style so eagerly employing imagery alluding to the Allegory of the Cave is evocative of Plato’s didactic use of figurative language. The numerous images alluding to Plato’s Allegory of the Cave in Murdoch’s fiction will be discussed as signalling the existence of a metaphysical

plane and as serving as a starting point for an interpretation of her novels in the light of his philosophical ideas. Combined together, the images evoking Platonic thought will be presented as provoking readers to engage in a deepened reflection transcending the frame of the literary work itself, thus serving the function ascribed by Plato to the metaphor. It will be argued that Murdoch's artistic choices, including her purposeful implementation of imagery, create a space for speculation and discovery of more abstract and complex concepts, convergent with Plato's didactic writing style.

Murdoch's use of figurative language has been noticed by scholars analyzing her literary oeuvre, but instead of the use of imagery and metaphor, more attention has been given to her use of symbol. Byatt explains Murdoch's attitude toward the use of symbols as follows:

I think that much of the uneasiness that her readers experience with her symbols in particular and patterning in general might well be attributed to the tension she herself seems to feel between her natural ability intellectually to organize, and her suspicion of the *tidying* function of the kind of literary form which now comes naturally to us. A novel, she says, has *got* to have form; but she seems to feel a metaphysical regret about it. (*Degress of Freedom* 216)

The function of symbols within Murdoch's narrative has also been investigated by Ewa Welnic in her work *Powieściopisarka i moralistka*. According to Welnic, symbolism in Murdoch's narratives illustrates "[t]he elusiveness of human nature, the difficulty of unambiguous interpretation. It is difficult to determine the symbol, which is usually multi-layered; the task of defining human personality is equally difficult" (84).

The presence of symbols in Murdoch's fiction provokes Byatt to suggest that her novels have a lot in common with the genre of *roman-mythe*: "In some of these senses Miss Murdoch's books could certainly be called *romans-mythe*; none of them are precisely allegorical but all could in some sense be described as symbolist and they tend increasingly to add a metaphysical dimension to the events they describe (*Degrees of Freedom* 211). Both Byatt and Welnic provide interesting observations on Murdoch's use of symbols in her fiction, and suggest an interpretation of Murdoch's style as essentially metaphysical, reaching beyond the form of the literary work through the literary device of symbol. However, it will be argued here that notwithstanding Murdoch's use of symbol, the same function in her fiction is performed by her imagery which alludes to Plato's Allegory of the Cave.

To explain the link between Plato's use of metaphor and Murdoch's writing style, let me explain my understanding of the term 'metaphor' first. In the most basic sense in which it is used in this thesis, a metaphor can be understood as a device in which one thing represents another, thus, inducing seeing one thing in terms of another. It must be emphasized that the meaning of the term which is incorporated in my thesis is indebted to the modern theory on metaphor deriving in particular from the work of George Lakoff. Lakoff became famous for his reappraisal of metaphors as vital elements of the socio-political lives of humans.<sup>36</sup> In his study, co-written with Mark Turner, *More Than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor*, metaphor is discussed as a literary device and a tool which we use on an everyday basis:

Metaphor is a tool so ordinary that we use it unconsciously and automatically, with so little effort that we hardly notice it. It is omnipresent: metaphor suffuses our thoughts, no matter what we are thinking about. It is accessible to everyone: as children, we automatically, as a matter of course, acquire a mastery of everyday metaphor. It is conventional: metaphor is an integral part of our ordinary everyday thought and language. And it is irreplaceable: metaphor allows us to understand ourselves and our world in ways that no other modes of thought can. (*More than Cool Reason* xi)

This description of metaphor advanced by Lakoff characterizes it as a mode of thinking and processing the surrounding world which, if one wants to understand more complex ideas, is indispensable not only to our imagination but also to our reason. In Lakoff's understanding metaphor ceases to be mere ornamentation and becomes vital to the understanding of reality.

Long before Lakoff's retrieval of metaphor as a means of processing reality, Murdoch advocated the advantages of figurative language in *The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts*. In this philosophical essay, first delivered as a part of the Leslie Stephen lectures in 1967, Murdoch claims that:

The development of consciousness in human beings is inseparably connected with the use of metaphor. Metaphors are not merely peripheral decorations of even useful models, they are fundamental forms of our awareness of our condition: metaphors of space, metaphors of movement and metaphors of vision [...] However, it seems to me impossible to discuss certain kinds of concepts without resort to metaphor, since the concepts are themselves deeply metaphorical and cannot be analysed into non-metaphorical components without a loss of substance. (*Existentialists and Mystics* 363)

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<sup>36</sup> *Metaphors We Live By* written by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson is a study devoted to the use of metaphor. Published in 1980, it initiated a cognitive turn in the way we approach this literary device.

Metaphors are thus described by Murdoch as a mode of understanding, and of acting upon our condition. Murdoch perceives metaphor as an integral part of a narrative structure but also a construct that creates a bubble of meaning, meaning which surpasses the boundaries of literary work but which has a uniqueness and separateness of its own. Her approach to metaphor converges with Lakoff's statements in *Contemporary Theory of Metaphor*. Lakoff states that the use of metaphor involves a transfer from one category or domain to another, so that the source domain provides the conceptual structure of the target domain. The mapping proceeds from the concrete, accessed by the senses, to the abstract. In this way, abstract concepts can be said to be metaphorically constructed (*Contemporary Theory of Metaphor* 6).

Altorf's excellent study of the correlation between Murdoch's novel writing and her philosophy, *Iris Murdoch and the Art of Imagining*, explores Murdoch's use of literary elements such as metaphor and imagery and presents it as having a significant influence on the style of her philosophical essays. She points out that Murdoch understands the role of metaphors in their original meaning: "So, the Good, the sun and Love are all examples of metaphors. Murdoch understands these in their original meaning of *meta-ferein*, that is *transferring* a literal meaning to something else, which can't be described literally" (Altorf 28). Altorf traces Murdoch's use of metaphor in her philosophical essays and presents it as a tool used to explain Murdoch's concepts. Considering Murdoch's unique interdisciplinary background, including philosophy and literature, her use of imagery and metaphor in these two different discourses may have a similar function. It appears that metaphors are treated by Murdoch as universal tools, which can be used to elucidate abstract ideas and applied in both forms of writing.

Murdoch's use of imagery that alludes to Plato's Allegory of the Cave performs a function similar to the one ascribed to metaphor and symbol. The shapes and sizes of spatial and mental constructs evocative of the Cave differ from novel to novel, but they always prompt us to interpret the story in the light of Plato's ideas, thus beyond its literal meaning. The presence of these images inducing a search for metaphorical meaning is a permanent feature of Murdoch's writing style which has direct implications for the reader's construction of meaning.

Strategically dispersed across Murdoch's narratives, the images that evoke Plato's philosophical thought create a net, an intricate semantic construct, the ubiquity of which calls for the reader's attention. This set of separate, self-contained elements arranged and

interpreted together raises the understanding of Murdoch's own message as expressed in her novels to a different level. Evoking Plato's Allegory, a universally recognized model, it allows Murdoch to divert the reader's attention from the realistic plane of her plots, and to induce reading which entails a deeper analysis of the moral and ethical message she inscribes within her narrative.

In "The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts" Murdoch points out that philosophy in the past recognized the importance of metaphor: "Philosophy in general, and moral philosophy in particular, has in the past often concerned itself with what it took to be our most important images, clarifying existing ones and developing new ones" ("The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts" 363). In the same essay she points out: "Plato, who understood this situation better than most of the metaphysical philosophers, referred to many of his theories as 'myths', and tells us that the *Republic* is to be thought of as an allegory of the soul" ("The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts" 377). Here, as well as expressing a high regard for metaphor as a stylistic device capable of illustrating abstract ideas, Murdoch expresses her approval of Plato who applies the device in order to clarify his complex concepts.

Metaphor, as a mode of representation, was extensively used by Plato. In *The Republic* itself, apart from the Allegory of the Cave, Plato discusses the statesman and his duties in terms of the painter, the builder, the craftsman. Frank Ankersmit observes that Plato's political philosophy is especially rich in metaphor and states that "Plato, the sworn enemy of rhetoric, is Hobbes's most serious rival in combining a prolific use of metaphors with an utter condemnation of them" (158).

As a writer and philosopher, Plato used metaphors as an effective teaching device. In "Style and Pedagogy in Plato and Aristotle", Harry Lesser argues that "Plato is thus most concerned to convince the pupil that he needs to learn, and to teach him the general principles of how to learn and how the world of knowledge is structured: if he can come to this, he can apply it to anything" (390-391). The same idea is expressed by Berel Lang in *Philosophy and the Art of Writing: Studies in Philosophical and Literary Style* who claims that Plato's dialogues make use of both presentation, the assertive statement of a state of affairs, and representation, an image or iconic sign (84). He claims that:

The reading of Plato's work to which I call attention can, then, be formulated as follows: that the dialogues characteristically employ both presentation and representation as modes of expression; that

there is a typical conjunction in the dialogues in the occurrence of these modes; that the reasons for the conjunction are not only stylistic or rhetorical, but are embedded in Plato's epistemology [....]. (Lang 86)

Douka Kabitoglou who also analyses Plato's writing style in *Plato and the English Romantics* states that "Plato's use of figurative or metaphorical language is, I believe, a parallel to his dialectical method; the collapsing of barriers between linguistic categories in metaphor mirrors the exercises of 'disputation' and 'confutation', tearing the known world into pieces and leading to a 'violent distrust' of all that had formerly been 'held true' [...]" (200). Kabitoglou points out that the metaphors become approachable and understandable imitations or equivalences of higher reality. Samuel Scolnicov's point of view expressed in "Beyond Language and Literature" also concurs with the previous statements. Scolnicov claims that: "The fulcrum of Plato's thought is beyond language. Its meaning cannot convincingly be put into words. Nor can it be proven, for a proof would have to be based on some primitive assumption, which would, again, be open to the same difficulty" (12).

Reading Plato's dialogues and Murdoch's fiction one must admit that the philosophical reflections presented within their texts are easier to apprehend because of their use of visually oriented images and metaphors. The importance and role of metaphors and images in Plato's and Murdoch's writing has been noted by Zuba who emphasizes that "[m]yths and metaphors are obviously important in Murdoch's and Plato's schemes as they allow pictorial explanations of a reality which cannot be accurately described until one reaches the end-point of the quest. Therefore pictures, metaphors and images are not only useful in describing the moral quest but are essential in depicting and providing inspiration for moral life" (246).

In Murdoch's fiction, similarly to Plato's use of figurative language in his dialogues, there is a group of images linked thematically and alluding to his Allegory of the Cave which encourages the reader to assemble these scattered carriers of meaning. The images dissolved across Murdoch's narratives create a ladder, built up from many separate rungs, which allows the reader to slowly climb up, higher and higher and to finally reach, or at least glimpse at a new meaning, till now unattainable. Because the nuances and objectives of the moral life can be extremely difficult to comprehend without good examples, the plots of Murdoch's novels are supplemented with metaphorical images informing her readers of the nature of the changes that are taking place. Murdoch introduces 'self-contained' symbols and images which are incapable of capturing the contingent nature of reality or the character, but which

essentially allow her to teach us a valuable lesson. Based on an 'acceptable simplification' the fictional world she builds in her novels provides a path which guides her reader's understanding from something familiar and obvious to a completely new realization. The images she uses facilitate this process of learning and discovery on the part of the reader. They transform the reading of a fictional text into a reflection that can be applied in real life.



## Chapter II

### Plato's Dialectic in Iris Murdoch's Narratives

Iris Murdoch's novels seem to be well cut excerpts from the lives of various social classes. In the scenes begot by the fruitful imagination of the author one encounters intellectuals with impressive family backgrounds, crème de la crème of the society, along with gypsies, impoverished immigrants or con-artists. Representatives of fine arts, like accomplished writers or painters, rub shoulders with suspicious 'men of all trades'. In Murdoch's novels the characters whose sociocultural background is so diversified find themselves in difficult positions when they have to communicate with and, more importantly, understand one another. Considering Murdoch's predominantly realistic style one might have expected that the differences in social status or cultural background would be presented as the main obstacle preventing mutual understanding. Murdoch's portrayal of human interactions, however, is far more complex and thought-provoking.

To understand the author's depiction of communication process and to interpret the complicated net of interpersonal relations in her novels, one has to realize, first and foremost, the role of the intellectual atmosphere of the post-war era in Murdoch's creative output. After surveying Murdoch's non-fictional essays one can conclude that her reception of many doctrines and ideas popular at her time was rather unfavourable. Maria Antonaccio observes that Murdoch wrote many of her philosophical treatises as a critical response to the philosophies dominant in the 1950s: the "Anglo-American linguistic philosophy and philosophy of mind represented in the work of R.M. Hare, Stuart Hampshire, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and the existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre" (*Picturing the Human* 17).

Existentialism was a philosophical movement that struck the author as particularly affecting human interactions. Murdoch met with continental existentialism in 1945. Despite her initial excitement, the idea of man promoted by Jean-Paul Sartre eventually met with Murdoch's disapproval. In "Existentialist Bite" Murdoch summarizes the appeal of the philosophy as "dramatic, solipsistic, romantic and anti-social exaltation of the individual" ("Existentialist Bite" 153). An important factor prompting her rejection was the existentialist denial of intersubjective certainty, thus of the possibility of any authentic communication. According to Sartre, our consciousness successfully nullifies all the things 'on the outside'

and the existence of the other person can never be truly recognized nor grasped by the subject. Murdoch disagreed with the existentialist rejection of the importance of the other, which equals the latter's degradation for the sake of supremacy of the self. The cloistered and alienated self, relying on its own subjective discourse, is unable to discover any truth about itself, not to mention produce a proper picture of the reality in which he/she lives. Therefore, the existentialist ontology and its models of consciousness as abstractions and dogmatic mythologies of closure were eventually rejected by the author.

Apart from existentialism, Murdoch was also overtly sceptical towards the achievements of the Anglo-Saxon analytic philosophy. She compared Gilbert Ryle's *The Concept of Mind* with Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* because she believed that English analytic philosophy shares the same general orientation as continental philosophy. Peter Conradi explains the comparison claiming that for the author English linguistic philosophy, like French existentialism, is the heir of Romanticism. According to Conradi both movements "share a common voluntarism, a romantic overemphasis on the will and both "separate the moral agent from all that surrounds him"(*The Saint and the Artist* 22).

The popularity of the ideas listed above, according to the author, might result in some serious cases of misconceptions and consequently may lead to miscommunication. Murdoch's dissatisfaction with philosophical programs offered by her contemporaries and the lack of any reasonable alternative inspired her not only to analyse the ideas using the creative machinery of novelistic prose writing but also to redefine the ways in which we should relate to other human beings. Murdoch's concern with the influence of the Sartrean man as well as its English ideological counterpart as voiced in her fiction emerges as an artistic critique of the picture of man offered by these philosophical movements. Her prose throughout the years evolved to illustrate those radically false philosophical assumptions and promote an attitude that served to re-establish a person's vital connection with the outer world, so severely affected and endangered by the advent of existentialism and of thinkers like Gilbert Ryle or R.M Hare.

Murdoch restrains from discussing more conventional sources of interpersonal misunderstandings and instead engages herself in the creative process of identifying less visible hindrances, often directly connected to the philosophical movements discussed above. A character from her novel, which can be treated as voicing the author's views, describes the process of extracting and pinpointing the problems in the following way: "Put three emotional

fairly clever people in a fix and instead of trying to communicate with each other they will dream up some piece of communal violence” (*A Fairly Honourable Defeat* 419). Murdoch’s predilection for the type of artistic experiments exposing pathological patterns in our behaviour is mirrored in her fiction. Carefully arranged scenes, twists and turns of the plot as well as meaningful characterization, all serve the purpose of illustrating the faulty ways in which we communicate and interact.

The dynamic of these unusual juxtapositions along with the potential problems in communication stemming from the encounters constitute an aspect of Murdoch’s fiction that raises many interpretive questions and deserves closer scrutiny. Therefore, in this chapter I propose to analyse the processes of communication as depicted by Murdoch in relation to the ancient, philosophical tradition, so much respected and studied by her. In Murdoch’s novels the participants of the communicative act, its circumstances and finally the content of the conversation itself will be discussed here with reference to the works of Plato. Emphasis will be put especially on the influence of Plato’s dialectical thinking preserved in the form of his dialogues, as a model inspiring Murdoch’s narrative style. I will argue that Murdoch not only recycles Plato’s philosophical thought but also utilizes and reinterprets the generic form of dialogue, inseparable from his dialectic. If the impact of the contemporary philosophical movements that popularise an inaccurate picture of man is diagnosed by Murdoch to be one of the factors affecting negatively our ability to view ourselves and thus to communicate efficiently with others, I propose that her rediscovery of Plato’s dialectics and the Socratic dialogue constituted a source of inspiration for her innovative solution of the problem of interpersonal communication.

## **II.1 Socratic dialogue as a genre conducive to education: the relationship between the generic form and content**

Plato believed in the existence of an unseen and intangible world, the place of origin of all things, from which also the human spirit has come. The world we experience through our senses, according to the philosopher, is nothing more than a shadow of the superior reality consisting of ideal entities called Forms. Consequently, for Plato, as Kahn observes, philosophy is essentially “the practice of spiritual liberation by which the rational psyche prepares itself for a successful voyage back to its transcendental homeland” (66).

The acceptance of Plato’s model in practice equalled the rejection of many traditional attitudes and typical values of the Greek society in the fifth and fourth centuries BC. As Kahn

points out the philosopher had to introduce his system to “a world of petty pride, heroic passion, ordinary lust and greed, unlimited ambition and utter ruthlessness. In such a world the metaphysical vision seemed almost grotesquely out of place” (67). The atmosphere of late antiquity, the age of Gnosticism and theurgy, fostered some ideological boldness. Nevertheless, Plato’s celestial, otherworldly vision remained truly revolutionary and stood in a direct opposition to the views on the human destiny and the moral code of his contemporaries.

Plato was aware that the task of convincing his fellow citizens about supremacy of his model required ‘an educational tool’ capable of purifying the minds of old opinions and preparing the Greeks for the novelty of his metaphysics. The tool came in the form of dialectic, a teachable *technē*, skills that could be acquired for the purpose of critical analysis of reality. For Plato the search for truth begins with asking a right question so dialectic was designed to take into consideration the first principles or premises in order to detect rational contradictions, inconsistencies or errors in reasoning during a guided discussion. Murdoch characterizes the task of Plato’s dialectics in the following way:

In the *Sophist* (230 C), dialectic is described as a purgation of the soul by ἐλεγχος, argument, refutation, cross-questioning; and in *Phaedo* (67 E) true philosophers are said to ‘practice dying’. Philosophy is training for death, when the soul will exit without the body. It attempts by argument and the meticulous pursuit of truth to detach the soul from material and egoistic goals and enliven its spiritual faculty, which is intelligent and akin to the good. (“The Fire and the Sun” 404)

One must understand that apart from being a supreme literary artist and an author who offered a systematic definition of the goals and methods of philosophy, Plato was also “a social reformer and an educator, whose conception of philosophy entailed a radical transformation of the moral and intellectual culture of his own time and place” (xiii). Plato’s yearning for political reconstruction is expressed in his works, spanning his whole career. *The Republic* or *Laws* are the dialogues which in fact are devoted to the question of how to impose a moral order on the life of the city. On account of Plato’s engagement in social matters, his dialectic should be viewed not only as a privately used method of self-improvement but rather as a tool that ultimately is supposed to improve the whole society: “Socratic soul-tendence is both the prerequisite and the goal for political activity, so that philosophy pursued on the Socratic spirit is the only realistic way of working for political improvement” (52). Dialectic is chosen by the philosopher as the official designation for the highest kind of philosophical knowledge,

the knowledge that is identical with, or indispensable for, the art required of the statesman, *politikē technē* of the *Gorgias* and the royal art of the *Euthydemus*.

Plato's application of dialectic for social purposes can be explained in reference to his own political career. His social status and noble origin predestined Plato to public service but the shortcomings of Athenian democracy left him utterly disillusioned with politics. Confronted with the corrupt pragmatism of Athenian leaders, he turned to philosophy and writing, away from the political activity in traditional sense. The choice to abandon the life of a statesman, however, was not an easy one. In the *Seventh Letter* we may find an account of Plato's dilemma and a justification of his decision: "The races of mankind will not be released from evils until the class of true and genuine philosophers gain political power or until the rulers of the cities come by divine dispensation to practise true philosophy" (*The Seventh Letter*, 325E-326B). The passage explains that for Plato it was of vital importance to conceive of a career in philosophy as the continuation of politics by other means.

Apart from being a tool for self-improvement and reformation of society, dialectics was also a form of commemoration of Socrates, Plato's beloved teacher. Socrates, who tirelessly pursued intellectual inquiry by the method of question and answer, remains a fairly mysterious figure. Little is known about historical Socrates. Blank passages in Socrates's biography are filled mainly with accounts of later classical writers like Xenophon, Aristophanes and of course Plato. On the basis of these texts one cannot univocally declare Socrates to have been the father of the dialectical method, but it is admissible to state that he was definitely one of its most popular users.

Most of the accounts present Socrates as the user of dialectic mainly for the purpose of exposing the surrounding hypocrisy. Socrates was famous for his directness and merciless readiness to point out flaws in the reasoning of his interlocutors. His truth-revealing method of cross-questioning was a feared practice, especially by those in charge of the city. Here, it is worth mentioning that Socrates lived during the turbulent time when the Athenian hegemony was in decline after the defeat by Sparta in the Peloponnesian War. During that time the weakened government, responsible for this unfortunate course of events, sought to regain the trust of the public but the task proved to be more difficult with Socrates around, an uncorrupted man with high moral standards. The wandering sage, whose teachings encouraged healthy scepticism also towards the politicians, was eventually considered seditious by the prominent citizens who were not able to escape his sharp tongue. It is

supposed that Socrates's open critique of Athenian democracy, so desperately striving to regain authority, met with a strong opposition of the ruling statesmen and led to his trial. Socrates, found guilty of both corrupting the minds of the youth of Athens and not believing in the gods of the state, was sentenced to death by drinking a mixture containing poisonous hemlock in 399 BC.

Due to the fact that Socrates died without writing down a single word, Plato decided that it was up to him to defend the Socratic conception of *arête*, psychic goodness, as well as to develop and systematise the Socratic method of reasoning. Kahn comments upon the significance of this method and its influence on Plato in the following way:

If for Plato the highest form of philosophical activity is named "dialectic," the art of conversational discussion, that is an obvious reminder of the method of Socratic conversation, remains Plato's model for philosophic teaching and research. And the twin paradoxes of the Socratic moral position – that vice is a sort of ignorance and that no one does wrong voluntarily – are firmly embedded in Plato's latest work. (72)

Although the method was originally designed to be practised only verbally, Plato decided to write down the most important guidelines concerning its use. He used the form of dialogue as the most appropriate genre capable of mirroring the actual thought process. In *Dialectic and Dialogue* Dimitri Nikulin notices that "[i]n Plato we have a rare case where we can actually identify the beginning of the genre: that of dialogue, which is intimately bound to the practice of dialectic" (2). In its form the Platonic dialogue is deliberately structured as speech that imitates or reproduces in writing the step-by-step reasoning. Nikulin advocates the stance that Plato's dialectic originally was an oral practice established in oral dialogue in alternating rejoinders and as an exchange between interlocutors: "Written dialogue appeared as an imitation of oral dialectic; and finally, written dialectic was distilled into a non-dialogical and universal method of reasoning" (2). The very form of philosophical dialogue is that of questions and answers (in Greek, *erotetic* and *apocritic*), which tolerates an occasional monological incursion of a myth.<sup>37</sup> Consequently, Socratic dialogue, as exchange of rejoinders, is also already dialectical in its form. Additionally, as Nikulin points out, "Dialogue and dialectic are also parallel in that both are capable of ever further deepening one's understanding of a subject by considering it from various sides" (5).

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<sup>37</sup> *The Republic*, *Timaeus*, *Politicus* and *Critias* are examples of Plato's dialogues in which he employs myth to supplement his argument.

As a genre of prose literary works Socratic dialogue developed in Greece at the turn of the fourth century BC. Dialogues were probably composed before Plato. Tradition points to Zeno of Elea, or to a certain Alexemenus, but as the author of *Dialogue and Dialectic* points out, “Plato was the first to use prosaic written dialogue systematically for the purposes of showing and constructing what is thought about a given thing through speech, moving from presuppositions to a conclusion and aided by the mutual effort of interlocutors” (Nikulin 1).

It is worth mentioning that after the death of Socrates, quite a number of his friends and followers celebrated his teaching in the literary form of dialogue. Among so called Socratic authors one can distinguish Antisthenes, Aeschines, Phaedo and Eucleides. Additionally, we have at least anecdotal information concerning a fifth author, Aristippus. But it was Plato whose literary output contributed to the establishment of written dialogue as the first *prosaic* literary genre accessible to the general public. Before Plato, philosophers often wrote poems about nature to present their views. Plato changed the trend by establishing a new tradition which combines philosophical deliberations with the form of dialogue. Due to Plato’s literary talent, the so called “conversations with Socrates” (*Sōkratikoí logoi*), or as Aristotle refers to them in his *Poetics*, “Socratic discourses”, became an established literary genre.

In Plato’s dialogues, precisely in the way in which they are organized and composed, there is a strong relationship between philosophical content and the form.<sup>38</sup> Plato, using the form of dialogue, creatively employs the dialectical method for his own purposes. Aware of the possible shock his ideas may cause to his fellow citizens, Plato undertook the task of educating his target audience gradually, step by step. The diversified methods of argument and exposition one can observe in his dialogues are the result of his awareness of the distance between the revolutionary nature of his ideas and the capacity of the audience to grasp them. To prepare his contemporaries for more challenging and potentially problematic aspects of his philosophical doctrine, Plato chose to apply in his dialogues the so called ingressive mode of exposition. Unitarians like Kahn argue that even though his metaphysical philosophy was probably a ripe concept, he did not present all of his ideas from the first dialogue, but instead,

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<sup>38</sup> The order of the dialogues suggested by Kahn is as follows: Group I (*Apology, Crito, Ion, Hippias Minor, Gorgias, Menexenus, Laches, Charmides, Euthyphro, Protagoras, Meno, Lysias, Euthydemus, Symposium, Phaedo, Cratylus*), Group II (*Republic, Phaedrus, Parmenides, Theaetetus*), Group III (*Sophist, Statesman, Philebus, Timaeus, Critas, Laws*).

proceeded from easier to more advanced content.<sup>39</sup> Plato started with discussions employing the so called Socratic *elenchus*, a method of argumentation which was supposed to expose the falsity of the received beliefs. The next stage constitutes dialogues that focus on the moment of reaching an aporetic state, an awareness of one's own ignorance. The last and final stage of his exposition is dialogues in which Plato introduces in place of false beliefs the elements of his metaphysics which were supposed to fill the vacuum created by the dialectical practices. Only after many years of 'preparation for philosophical training' that his first dialogues like *Apology* illustrate, do we find Plato's ideas fully revealed and expressed, in *Symposium*, in the extra-celestial vision of *Phaedrus* and finally in *Phaedo*.

In order to appeal to the target audience and to facilitate the process of understanding even further, Plato planted his dialogues quite firmly in Athenian soil, in the social and political reality of the Socratic times. He managed to recreate the dramatic atmosphere of the previous age, the intellectual milieu of the late fifth century, by introducing numerous historical characters and figures of importance an average Athenian was familiar with; take for instance Gorgias the sophist or general Laches. In Plato's eyes, the traditional Greek worldview, as represented by Sophocles and Thucydides as well as by Homer and Hesiod, was radically false so Plato decided to introduce in his dialogues a charismatic alternative modelled on Socrates, the embodiment of a moral ideal and a paradigm philosopher. Kahn argues that in the developing of his literary works Plato wanted to rival his great predecessors and "sought to replace Achilles, Oedipus, and Pericles with his own hero, Socrates" who "did in fact become the hero figure for a new tradition, in which philosophy takes the place of religion for the educated public" (xv).

The structure and the content of the Socratic dialogues, oriented towards altering the worldview of Plato's contemporaries, seems to respond with great originality to the question: how does a teacher/author provide instructive guidance without undermining the independent and autonomous thought of the student/reader? Kenneth Dorter, the author of "Plato's Use of the Dialogue Form: Skepticism and Insemination" believes that Plato's use of the form of dialogue has a complex pedagogical function. According to Dorter, Plato's use of literary and logical devices induces readers to reflect critically on both the arguments and the doctrines that are examined in the dialogues. According to Dorter Plato wanted to awaken the readers'

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<sup>39</sup> The unitarian view is a trend in the studies of Plato's thought that goes back to Schleiermacher. Unitarians tend to assume that Plato's dialogues were composed from a single point of view. Consequently, the dialogues should be interpreted on literary and pedagogical grounds.



dormant intellectual faculties without indoctrination and the form of dialogue is “a device for opening our eyes to something, rather than an answered question to be accepted blindly through the ears” (43). Additionally, dialectic, being a tool, a method of reasoning bequeathed for next generations and embedded in the written form of dialogue, could serve as an accessible textbook or rather a manual containing the instructions and providing the examples of application. Nikulin observes that: “A dialogue may also be written for pedagogical purposes [...] in order to educate the young through participation in discussions and by providing memorable examples of proper reasoning” (Nikulin 10).

Plato undertook the task of educating the public by means of the genre of dialogue, a literary form capable of conveying his philosophical message. I would argue that Murdoch reinterpreted Plato’s classical dialogue and adapted certain elements of the genre to the needs of her narratives to achieve a similar didactic effect. Her use of dialogue, the form shunning direct indoctrination, responds to her need to stimulate in readers the suspiciousness towards discourses that imperceptibly enslave us and allows presentation of an alternative without taking an authoritative stance. In order to encourage a critical analysis of the ideas Murdoch found unacceptable and consequently to offer her Neo-Platonic, or should we say Murdochean alternative, the author utilized not only Plato’s philosophical legacy but more importantly, his artistic method of expression taking the form of dialogical confrontation evident in the composition of Plato’s works. Conradi admits that a particular form of doubleness has always been a major theme in Murdoch’s fiction: “Her imagination always worked by such embattled pairings and through dialectic” (*The Saint and the Artist* 266).

To achieve the desired effect of raising awareness in her audience, Murdoch preserves the formal skeleton of Socratic dialogue, a carefully arranged narrative situation built around a dialogical exchange. Similarly to Plato, Murdoch is concerned with figures of authority capable of exercising both good and bad influence. Therefore, in Murdoch’s fiction we will find teachers reminding us of the figure of Socrates, who lead their pupils in the direction of the good, as well as false spiritual guides who instead of teaching, lead their pupils astray. Both types appear as interlocutors engaged in debates reflecting the most pivotal moral dilemmas of Murdoch’s time. I suggest that because Murdoch applied in her fiction Plato’s model of resolving ideological debate by means of juxtaposition, she included in her narratives the reincarnated versions of ancient sophists, characters that represent ideas with which she disagrees and who emerge as interlocutors against whom her Murdochean message inscribed in her novels must find a way to defend itself.

## II.2 In search of contemporary sophists: Plato's dialogues and characterization in Murdoch's fiction

The conflict between different sources of influence and the question who should be allowed to educate is an important issue in Plato's agenda. Plato established the first permanent institution of higher education and scientific research, the paradigm for all academies, universities, and research centres down to our own time. Plato's school not only served to train Aristotle and a host of other important thinkers and scientists; it also provided the model for Aristotle and later philosophers to form their own schools. More importantly, "Plato's Academy never lost sight of its political mission, to serve as a 'nursery of statesmen' by raising men who would play an important role as political leaders or royal advisors" (Kahn 56).

As a teacher and a social reformer Plato had to compete with the sophists, the wandering teachers and a rival source of influence on the minds of young Athenians. The conflict between Socrates and the sophists is the theme of Plato's many dialogues. It is worth mentioning that in the fifth century the prospering city of Athens was a perfect place for sophists to visit. The flourishing democracy was in need of people who were good at debating. The sophists, who specialized in the art of conducting argument, received the fame and fortune they were seeking because they could prepare young Athenian males for public life in the *polis*, where without the knowledge of rhetoric it was hard to succeed and get a public office. Apart from rhetorical skills many sophists specialized in using the tools of philosophy. They taught subjects such as music, athletics, and mathematics claiming to teach excellence or virtue, as applied to these various subject areas.

One of the most famous portrayals of the sophists can be found in *Gorgias*. Socrates, who represents an ideal teacher, morally pristine, wise and not interested in material goods, is juxtaposed with Gorgias, an acclaimed and admired sophist, whose educational services were costly and made him a name among the Athenians, yet they were far away from the education in the Platonic sense. Gorgias, compared to Socrates, is the exact opposite of the good teacher, the reason being that the orator does not convey any *knowledge* of subject matter, but only the skill of persuasion. "Oratory serves, Socrates, to produce the kind of conviction needed in courts of law and other large assemblies, and the subject of this kind of conviction is right and

wrong”, says the sophist (*Gorgias* 30; Murdoch’s emphasis).<sup>40</sup> Additionally, Gorgias explains that a rhetorician does not need to know what is just and noble and good. The distinction between right and wrong is not the subject of his art, consequently it is not needed. What counts is the final result, namely the effect on the addressee, which must converge with the speaker’s will.

Gorgias believes that rhetoric is a value-free instrument of political power and declines responsibility if the oratorical skills he teaches will be applied for bad purposes. “If a man who has acquired oratorical skills uses the power which his art confers to do wrong, that is no reason to detest and banish his teacher” (*Gorgias* 35; Murdoch’s emphasis). Socrates, on the other hand, claims that someone who is training young men for leadership and political power cannot publically disclaim moral responsibility for the use that is made of his training.

Plato’s portrayal of sophists is rather unfavourable. First of all, the philosopher condemns the master - pupil relationship that depends on financial gratification, which was an inevitable part of the arrangement. According to Plato, access to education should not be restricted. Also, the practical skills taught by sophists, although useful in public life, are considered by Plato to be inappropriate for the young minds, which should be exposed to some substantial knowledge rather than instructed how to manipulate the audience for their own purposes.

Plato believed that as far as education was concerned sophists provided content of a low quality. “Both in the *Euthydemus* and, more explicitly, in the *Meno*, Socrates is saying that the education as understood by the rhetoricians and the sophists is no education at all” (Newsome 28; Murdoch’s emphasis). In Plato’s view, the sophists were not real teachers but merely impostors. A sophist is a person who “counterfeits the ‘wise man’ more than half of knowing himself to be fraud” (Taylor 392; Murdoch’s emphasis). The author of *Plato: The Man and His Work* goes even further in describing sophists:

The secret or miracle of sophistry lies in contriving to *appear* to be such a universal expert. A clever illusionist might delude children into the belief that he can *make anything and everything by showing them pictures* of all sorts of things at a sufficient distance. (If a child were young enough, it would *e.g.*, take the man and horses in a cinema picture for real animals.) Why then should there not be an analogous

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<sup>40</sup> The fragments followed by the comment “Murdoch’s emphasis” are supposed to mirror the underlining done by Iris Murdoch in the original versions of the quoted texts. Murdoch was an active reader, thus many of the books she owned and kept in her library contain her comments and remain an invaluable source of study material.

art of illusion by means of discourse which imposes “imitations” of truth on youthful mind? May we not say that at bottom the sophist is an “imitator” and “illusionist” or “wizard”. (Taylor 381-382; Murdoch’s emphasis<sup>41</sup>)

What a sophist produces is not real knowledge; he produces phantasms, deceptive reproductions “*false appearances, false discourses, and false beliefs*” (Taylor 381-382). Therefore, apart from the main argument against sophists, mainly their materialism, they are accused of propelling false beliefs, of disseminating false appearances and in general of introducing falsity into the discourse.

The question who should lead the next generations and in what direction is also a prominent theme in Murdoch’s fiction, which is understandable considering Murdoch’s own career as an academic teacher. In her copy of *Gorgias* Murdoch scribbled the question directly connected to the problem of exercising influence, which refers to Plato’s dialogues: “The sophist, who is he now?” giving us a clue that the old confrontation between the Socratic ideal and the Sophist alternative may have inspired her to an extent greater than we used to suspect.

## **II.2.i Figures of writers and artists**

To look for echoes of sophistry in Murdoch’s fiction one can rely on the guidelines provided by the author herself. At the end of her copy of *Protagoras* Murdoch wrote: “Artists are secret sophists!”. Therefore, in order to discuss Murdoch’s reinterpretation of Plato’s sophists I would like to turn to the characters of writers as representatives of the whole class of artistically gifted individuals making appearance in her novels - characters directly related to those appearing in Plato’s texts. To answer the question what does an artist and a sophist have in common according to Murdoch, one must introduce to the discussion Plato’s ideas concerning art as well as Murdoch’s own understanding of art’s role in our life.

Plato’s relationship with art was complicated. He relied on the form of dialogue in order to popularize and immortalize the Socratic method; in fact he was in constant fear that he might be misunderstood, that the words in a written form are too susceptible to manipulation and cannot defend themselves as efficiently as a real-life dialogue. Szlezák observes that Plato’s fear of the misguided reception is evident in his works, especially in *Phaedrus* where

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<sup>41</sup> The fragments from *Plato: the Man and his Work* and *Two Classes of Man: Platonism and English Romantic Thought* were underlined by Murdoch in her copy of the books, adding to the argument that the author displayed some interest in the role of the sophists and the way they were perceived by Plato.

Plato compares the author wanting to voice his ideas in writing to a farmer sowing grains in the garden of Adonis. The intelligent farmer would not do such a thing, because in the garden of Adonis the grains decay and do not give fruits (8).<sup>42</sup>

Plato's fear of being misunderstood stemmed from his painful awareness that art has the power to influence and that power remains awfully ambiguous in its nature. In Plato's dialogues we will find both positive and negative examples of art's application. In the *Laws* for instance the didactic uses of art are studied in detail. Rulers in the *Laws* are to use the charms of religion and notably of art in the service of social stability. Plato's depiction of art in *The Republic*, on the other hand, constitutes one of the most memorable attacks on art in the history of literature, where Plato condemns art's ability to arouse emotions gratifying the irrational, appetitive part of the soul whilst destroying the rational part.

Artists who are in command of this fearful power, according to Plato, are equally dangerous because they have and always had the ears of the audience. The conviction is shared by Murdoch who observes in her essay: "The poets had existed, as prophets and sages, long before the emergence of philosophers, and were the traditional purveyors of theological and cosmological information. Herodotus tells us that the Greeks knew little about the gods before Homer and Hesiod taught them" ("The Fire and the Sun" 386). Great art forms, and is the vital part of, tradition. If influential art becomes a written source of authority on which people conventionally rely, with great power comes great responsibility, and Plato believed that artists do not always respect this obligation. The fact that art is interested in evil and gives bad examples to naive recipients worried Plato as much as art's readiness to mock traditional values. Murdoch, who also recognized this threat, explains Plato's stance by emphasizing in her essay the fact that: "We are infected by playing or enjoying a bad role. Art can do cumulative psychological harm in this way" ("The Fire and the Sun" 390).

Plato's attitude towards art was influenced by his own dilemma, which was the inner conflict between the writer, a shadow maker, and the philosopher, a shadow-extinguisher. Plato saw the two disciplines as mutually exclusive. The art was considered an area of human activity appealing to emotions, and philosophy as relying on pure reason. The conflict overshadowing Plato's life emerges as the subject of Murdoch's own Socratic dialogue entitled "Above the Gods". In the dialogue she describes Plato through the words of

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<sup>42</sup> The fragment is a paraphrase of the following quote: „Platon porównuje autora chcącego na piśmie głosić to, co bierze on serio, z rolnikiem, który chce wysiewać mające przynieść plon ziarna w ogrodzie Adonisa. Rozumny rolnik tak nie postąpi, gdyż w ogrodzie Adonisa ziarno niszczy i nie daje owocu” (Szlezák 8).

Alcibiades in the following way: “[Plato] is a juggler, a magician, a little apprentice magician who had better scuttle back to poetry and leave philosophy to stronger heads” (“Above the Gods” 522). In her depiction of Plato it is suggested that the preoccupation with art could reflect poorly on a person’s aptitude to do serious philosophy, because the two discourses, the two disciplines traditionally cannot be reconciled.

As evident in this description of Plato, among the main arguments against artists was their reliance on fantasy. A work of art which originates in the realm of unreal has necessarily the ontological status opposite to that of truth. To be an artist, according to Plato, entails putting in front of people something that in its very essence is unreal. This quality of art relates it directly to the sophist’s activities. Similarly to sophists, artists manipulate with facts in order to achieve a desired effect. Nettleship Richard Lewis and Godfrey Rathbone Benson observe: “[Plato] is thinking of the extremely obvious fact that the artist does not in any case put before us the actual objects of real life, but certain appearances only, he represents and only presents” (344, Murdoch’s emphasis). According to Murdoch, the artist produces magical objects “which feed the fantasy life of the ego and its desire for omnipotence” (“The Fire and the Sun” 444). These magical objects have the value similar to the shadows displayed on the wall in the cave. Murdoch emphasizes that “Plato does not actually say that the artist is in a state of *eikasia*, but he clearly implies it” (“Fire and the Sun” 390). The tendency the sophists and writers share to obscure truth, to hide it behind their own words is emphasized in Murdoch’s description of a bad artist: “The tone or style by which the writer or painter puts himself ‘in the clear’ may be very close to a subtle insincerity” (“Fire and the Sun” 449).

Because art shadows truth and plays with what is magical and fantastic, it may confuse human quest for truth. Therefore, art, like sophistry, is nominated by Plato as a chief enemy of philosophy. Murdoch explains why art may pose a threat to the purity of dialectical reasoning:

Art is sophistry, at best an ironic *mimesis* whose fake ‘truthfulness’ is a subtle enemy of virtue. Indirectness and irony prevent the immediate relationship with truth while it occurs in live discourse; art is thus the enemy of dialectic. Writing and painting introduce an extra distancing notation and by charm fix it in place. They create a barrier of imagery which arrests the mind, rigidifies the subject matter, and is defenceless against low clients. [...] Art makes us content with appearances, and by playing magically with particular images it steals the educational wonder of the world away from philosophy and confuses our sense of direction toward reality and our motives for discerning it. (“The Fire and the Sun” 443)

The figure of a bad artist, the artist who epitomizes Plato's and Murdoch's fears concerning wrong application of artistic skills, resembles an ancient sophist, the figure wielding a great power yet exercising a bad influence. Murdoch characterizes the bad artist of her age as "a figure on the road toward the 'all is permitted' and 'man is the measure of all things' of the cynical sophist" ("The Fire and the Sun" 452).

The concept of art as a form of sophistry is especially emphasized by Murdoch in the performance of her artistically gifted intradiegetic narrators. One example of a writer endowed with the features of a sophist is Bradley Pearson, the first-person narrator of *The Black Prince*. Bradley is portrayed as an elderly author of only few, rather unpopular books who, however, regards himself as a writer of an exceptional insight and sensitivity. He often compares himself with Arnold Baffin, his friend and literary rival, criticizing Arnold's lack of proper literary credentials. In spite of his high standards and self-professed artistic maturity, compared with a prolific and recognized writer as Arnold, Bradley's artistic achievements are unimpressive. While waiting for the capricious Muse to grant him the long-awaited vision, Bradley enters in a teacher-student relationship with Julian Baffin, Arnold's daughter. Julian, thirty-eight years younger than her teacher, attempts to start a career as a writer and is in a desperate need to find a reliable guide who could introduce her to some great pieces of literature. Full of enthusiasm and admiration for the older, more experienced veteran of the publishing market, Julian declares to Bradley on numerous occasions: "I want you to be my tutor. You're the only sort of possible real teacher in my life", "I regard you as my philosopher", "My guru" (*The Black Prince* 59, 137, 138). Bradley undertakes upon her request to discuss literature together to broaden the horizons of the aspiring artist and prepares, according to her wishes, a reading list consisting of only the *great* and the *hard* titles.

Because Bradley greatly admires Shakespeare and secretly aspires to create a masterpiece comparable to the Bard's works, he asks Julian to read *Hamlet* for her first assignment. His attitude towards the process of education as illustrated by his behaviour during the meetings with Julian as well as his analysis of the play allows us to approach Bradley as a modern version of the sophist. The discussions, which were supposed to proceed in the manner of questions and answers, are high-jacked by Bradley who continually dismisses all signs of sceptical criticism on Julian's side: "You're going to waste my time with these questions and then not believe my answer" (*The Black Prince* 194). Bradley interrupts Julian every time she wants to share with him her observations: "Bradley, I read

such an extraordinary theory about sonnets - 'Be silent' was his response and he continued with his thoughts" (*The Black Prince* 198). The proceedings of the discussion allow us to conclude that Bradley's idea of educating young minds stands in direct opposition to the dialectical practices portrayed in Plato's dialogue. Bradley's preference of monologic lecturing shunning dialogical exchange, contributes to his portrayal as a sophist, who overwhelms his pupil with his opinionated utterances and displays a complete lack of the Socratic humility towards the subject matter.

Interestingly, Murdoch herself called the book narrated by Bradley 'an authoritarian work' and said that "for the attentive reader, it is made clear how you should interpret the wanderings and maunderings of a narrator and where you should believe him and where you should not believe him" (quoted in *The Saint and the Artist* 236). The author herself stresses the fact that Bradley's manner of conducting dialogue not only with Julian but also with the reader, makes him appear as a shrewd sophist with an ulterior motive rather than a wise dialectician.

The content of Bradley's lectures on Hamlet is also questionable. In the light of his interpretation, which he presents as the theory that has not been thought of even at Oxford, "Gertrude killed her husband because he was having a love affair with Claudius" and "Hamlet knew of course. No wonder he was neurotic" (*The Black Prince* 160). When Julian wonders why Hamlet hesitated to kill Claudius, Bradley explains that Hamlet was hesitating: "because he was a dreamy conscientious young intellectual who wasn't likely to commit a murder out of hand because he had the impression that he had seen the ghost. Next question" (*The Black Prince* 194). The moral weight of Hamlet's dilemma was utterly ignored by Bradley, erased from the equation. His rather shallow analysis of Hamlet's motives reveals the poverty of his own moral life but also echoes moral relativism of the sophists in Plato's dialogues.

In *The Black Prince* we encounter a sophist who is deeply under the spell of art itself. Bradley's understanding of art is superficial and limited because he considers it an aesthetically pleasing container devoid of any moral lesson. As a result of his misconception he turns art into a golden statue, an idol, the glowing appearance of which remains empty inside. Bradley believes that the popularity of *Hamlet* lies in its quotability and is mesmerized by the glitter and glamour of Shakespeare's mastery of words. He comments on *Hamlet*:

The thing is a monument of words. It is Shakespeare's most rhetorical play, it is his longest play, it is his most inventive and involuted literary exercise. [...] It is the eloquence of direct speech, it is *oratio*



*recta not oratio obliqua* [...] He [Shakespeare] transmutes his private obsessions into a rhetoric so public that it can be mumbled by any child. (*The Black Prince* 199-200)

Bradley's devotion to the form itself, to the veil of words in which a proper message should be cloaked with, and inability to see the precious content, again contributes to his depiction as a sophist, a figure devoid of real knowledge. Being a writer himself, using words freely as tools to manipulate and influence his surroundings, he is not able to see through the linguistic barrier and thus does not have access to the most valuable pieces of information.

Bradley's vision of art can be compared with Arnold's. Conradi comments on the differences in their attitudes in the following way: "It is a conflict between, on the one hand, Bradley's ferocious and censorious puritanism and, on the other, Baffin's tolerant, inquisitive and inclusive complaisance: it continues the great quarrel between the best and the second best" (*The Saint and the Artist* 241). Although Bradley likes to consider himself a true artist, a careful analysis of his narration shows that he resembles a sophist, an impostor who misunderstands the notion of true art and adheres to the illusory ideas of his own making.

This toxic relation between the sophist and art is paralleled by the relationship between Julian and Bradley. After giving Julian an extensive lecture on *Hamlet*, Bradley realizes that he is falling deeply in love with his student. He describes the experience as completely altering his perception, a sort of awakening which releases in him a romantic hero. An affair or rather a fling lasting a few days, in Bradley's "artistic" depiction turns into a great romance. His exaggerated first-person narration, the final product of his fantasy-ridden ego, may serve as an example of a sophistic trick. His account of the romance appears to be a crafty use of hyperbole, which was to guarantee him an entrance to the pantheon of great lovers known from the classics of literature and ensure his place among the greatest authors.

Julian, the heroine of his romance, is not the real object of his admiration, but only an excuse to write about himself and his emotions. The only time Bradley seems to be sexually stimulated by her is when she dresses as the prince Hamlet: "She was dressed in black tights, black shoes, she wore a black velvet jerkin and a white shirt and a gold chain with a cross about her neck. She had posed herself in the doorway of the kitchen, holding the sheep's skull up in one hand" (*The Black Prince* 328). Fascinated with the idea of romantic love, Bradley turns his feelings into a form of "romantic" logorrhea, an act which for him is the source of ultimate satisfaction, a pleasure greater than the contact with an actual person. His replacement of the 'real' emotions and events with the embellished narrative reflects on the

nature of his sophistic skills, which through manipulation with words in practice detach us from the reality and true meaning.

In a symbolic and ambiguous scene when Bradley makes love to Julian for the first time, the Platonic tradition forms the background and informs us on Bradley's real motives. Before the act of making love takes place Bradley remembers that "Plato lay with a beautiful boy and thought it no shame to see here the beginning of the path to the sun. Happy love undoes the self and makes the world visible" (*The Black Prince* 349). Bradley decides to literally use Julian in order to "produce his great work of art", to make contact with the god, to get a glimpse of metaphysical knowledge.

Bradley's professed adoration of Julian should be analysed with reference to his obsession with *Hamlet* and his writer-complex. To surpass the Bard, Shakespeare himself, to fulfil his dream of achieving greatness, Bradley was prepared to perform a mysterious, metaphysical ritual, which would please the god of art and catalyse his own creative outburst. He deluded himself that by uniting with the person epitomising the great work of art, he would be able to enter in a meaningful relationship with great art itself but the subsequent events surrounding their romantic affair illustrate the naivety of his beliefs and once again thrust him into the role of a sophist, deluded by the magical object into which he turned the art.

Another of Murdoch's characters displaying a set of features similar to Plato's sophists is Charles Arrowby appearing in *The Sea, the Sea*. Arrowby leaves the hustle and bustle of overcrowded London for a secluded seaside mansion, a location which parallels his mental detachment from reality. He is obsessed with Hartley, his first love, and on account of this obsession is portrayed as a person completely blinded by the products of his imagination.

The depiction of Arrowby's various misconceptions and misunderstandings concerning his relationship with Hartley echoes Plato's famous allegory of the Cave. Arrowby is even repeatedly called by one of the characters 'King of shadows' (*The Sea, the Sea* 93). He resembles a slave dwelling in the cave with his sight fixed on shadows, but being a sophist, Arrowby completely misinterprets his situation: "The light in the cavern is daylight, not fire. Perhaps it is the only true life in my life, the light that reveals the truth" (*The Sea, the Sea* 79). The flame of his romantic feeling for Hartley is mistaken for the light that is supposed to guide us.

Incompetent to lead others on account of his 'blindness', Arrowby is characterized as a retired Prospero, and similarly to Shakespeare's character displays a certain type of allure combined with the ability to control people, to affect them and mould their behaviour in accordance with his own desires. Lizzie, a victim of his 'sophistry', accuses Arrowby: "You made me act, you made everyone act, you're like a very good dancer, you make other people dance, but it's got to be *with you*. You don't respect people as people, you don't *see* them, you're not really a teacher, you're a sort of rapacious magician" (*The Sea, the Sea* 45).

Interestingly, Arrowby is yet another character in Murdoch's fiction who is obsessed with Shakespeare but once again for all the wrong reasons. The misunderstanding is evident in Arrowby's argument explaining why he became a theatre director:

I went into the theatre of course because of Shakespeare [...] I fled to the trickery and magic of art. I craved glitter, movement, acrobatics, noise. I became an expert on flying machines, I arranged fights, I always took, as my critics said, an almost childish, almost excessive delight in the technical trickery of the theatre. (*The Sea, the Sea* 29)

The interest in the form itself, not supported with any deeper understanding of the moral values hidden in the great art, is again Murdoch's guile to draw our attention to the distinction between good and bad art and to point out that bad art in its very nature resembles sophistry. Arrowby's limited understanding contributes to his regarding of art as a tool to manipulate the emotions of the audience. Like a sophist, he believes that with his 'tricks' an artist can bend the audience to his will: "Theatre is an attack of mankind carried on by magic: to victimize an audience every night, to make them laugh and cry and suffer and miss their trains. Of course actors regard audiences as enemies, to be deceived, drugged, incarcerated, stupefied" (*The Sea, the Sea* 33). In Murdoch's portrayal of her sophist characters the misinterpretation of art, and its reification, signifies their intellectual poverty and casts a shadow on the whole ideological program they offer, the program consisting of mere opinions and not supported by some real knowledge on the subject-matter of art.

Additionally, Arrowby's readiness to occupy the position of power and his lack of Socratic humility presents him as a sophist who is intoxicated with his own skills. Like Murdoch's other sophists, he aspires to grandness and rejoices over having an influential position in the centre of attention, even if it was only imaginary: "A theatre director is a dictator. (If he is not, he is not doing his job). I fostered my reputation of ruthlessness, it was extremely useful. Actors expected tears and nervous prostration when I was around. Most of them loved it; they are masochists and narcissists" (*The Sea, the Sea* 37).

Charles's tendency towards tyranny rather than democracy echoes Plato's ideas concerning the application of philosophy for social purposes. First-person narratives, often characterized by a univocal vision and emphasizing the viewpoint of one character in particular, stand for Murdoch in direct opposition to the democratic institution of dialogue. The figure of the tyrant in Plato's understanding, being the synonym of unenlightened ruler and the opposition of the philosopher king, is Murdoch's another way to refer to the Platonic tradition. As we know from the *Gorgias*, from the *Republic* and from the *Laws*, for Plato the true art of politics, *politikē*, is the art of moral education. The tyrant is a character who does not understand that apart from ruling over the citizens he has moral responsibility for their well-being. To inflict pain on those whom he should protect is an unforgivable offence, a breach of the social contract, which should result in the deposition of the ruler. Arrowby, who in his personal life is cruel and ignorant of other people's feelings, seems to be the exact opposite of the enlightened king philosopher.

The nostalgic tone of the novel as well as the portrayal of the man dwelling on his memories and not being able to grasp and envision the influence of his past on the present moment, reminds us of Plato's dialogues. When virtue and education are discussed in *Laches* and *Charmides*, the political theme remains in the background, but it is dramatically represented by the choice of interlocutors: the future tyrants in the second case, and the distinguished generals and the sons of even more distinguished statesmen in the first. In the dialogues mentioned above Plato chooses to represent political leaders who according to him went astray and made bad moral choices. These are the figures he uses as examples not worthy to follow and their moral failure is presented as a warning. Murdoch, by casting Arrowby in the role of an ungracefully aging tyrant, much like Plato provides us with the example not worthy to follow and forces the reader to ponder upon the significance of the protagonist's life choices.

The 'tyranny' of the sophist is reflected in the form of the discourse preferred by him, namely long monologic speeches or first-person narration. These are essentially forms used by the speakers to display their own verbal virtuosity and satisfy the need to sway the addressee. When uninterrupted, when expressing himself at his own pace, the orator can freely manipulate with the emotions of the audience, the practice which is opposite to the dialectical training employing dialogue. In Plato the differences in the preferred type of discourse mirror the ideological discrepancy between Socrates and the sophists.

In Plato's dialogues Socrates favours dialogue whereas the sophists, although trained to participate in debates, prefer long speeches. Nikulin observes that "Plato's logos, or speech, is unique in that it uses the achievements of Socratic oral dialogical conversation in a constant and conscious opposition to sophistic monological speeches, which establish their superiority not by demonstration of proof, but by persuasion" (2). In Plato's writings the distinction between the discourse saturated with falsehood and the discourse striving for clarity is strongly present. On numerous occasions Socrates forces his interlocutors to abandon the florid style of speech for the sake of short and factual answers. In *Gorgias* Socrates insists that he has come to converse (*dialegesthai*) with Gorgias and ask him questions, rather than to listen to his display of eloquence (*Gorgias* 19). The sophists that appear in Plato's dialogues tend to evade dialogical exchange and often, instead of answering straightforwardly, they produce prolonged speeches. When Polus is asked to say what art Gorgias professes, he praises it instead of answering what it is (20). As Kahn observes, Polus shows that "he has studied what is called rhetoric rather than *dialegesthai*" (303). The question and answer technique was misused by the sophists, who treated it as a kind of oratory exercise to refute arguments, which had nothing to do with the goal of dialectics, for it was "the pursuit of refutation for its own sake, as a kind of sport" (305).

Murdoch's awareness of the fact that our mental speech is a residue of both truth and falsehood is mirrored in the narrative strategies she employs, especially in her use of first person narration. The verbalized thoughts, exteriorized in speech of the first-person narrators, are filled with self-absorbed illusions. The author acknowledged the fact that the process of thinking, of consciously analysing the data about our reality, which relies on linguistic items, is itself a type of discourse. What particularly concerned her was the influence of the ego on this inner discourse. The ego, the source of phantasms and illusions, affects negatively our ability to objectively survey information. Therefore, according to Murdoch, the strong presence of the ego, its proximity, results in the intrusion of falsity into the inner speech, which becomes the discourse tinted with personal needs and passions, far away from the clarity of reasoning that can guarantee intellectual development. In the essay "The Fire and the Sun", Murdoch discusses the phenomenon: "What the *Sophist* at last makes clear is that the Form system is available to us only in discourse. Thinking is inner speech, 263 E, 264 A, and *Theatetus*, 190 A. [...] This is where truth and knowledge live, and plausibility and falsehood too" ("The Fire and the Sun" 412).

The state of mind when Ego overpowers the ability of the individual to think clearly is reflected in Murdoch's first-person narratives. Charles Arrowby devotes his free time to writing his memoirs. The narration of the novel *The Sea, the Sea*, appearing to be the result of his 'musings', is filled to the brims with the narrator's illusions and dreams. The narrator is very effusive in describing his activities and mental states, simultaneously remaining unable to communicate with the local inhabitants. His lack of proper communication skills is evident in the few conversations quoted by the narrator, in which the interlocutors seem to operate on completely different levels.

The sophistic nature of Arrowby's speech is evident in his epistolary exchange with Lizzie, one of his many ex-lovers. In order to re-establish the broken bond and satisfy his selfish whim to regain Lizzie's affection, Charles chooses a non-committal form of a letter. He describes his own message in the following way: "a letter which constituted a-what? - a sort of test, or game, or gamble. A serious game. I had always played serious games with Lizzie" (*The Sea, the Sea* 41). What seems to be in this case an oxymoron, illustrates the self-contradictory nature of his statements and reveals his questionable intentions. His immoral readiness to "gamble" and "play" with Lizzie's feelings just to satisfy his curiosity and flatter his Ego is discreetly revealed in his musings. In response to his teasing letter, Lizzie writes:

Your letter is so cool, purposefully cool and full of jokes. [...] I look at your letter and I try to read between the lines. *What* is between the lines? I feel I am supposed to guess your mood. [...] Perhaps your letter means very little and I am imagining things. Perhaps you yourself do not know what you mean and, and don't care. (*The Sea, the Sea* 43)

The correspondence between Lizzie and Charles illustrates the deceptive nature of Charles's discourse, a form of self-creation that exposes its author, probably against his intention, to the reader. Charles accidentally reveals himself as a man purposefully applying language so as to escape. The carefully arranged set of words, expressed at a proper distance, leaves room for interpretation and is deliberately misleading, forcing us to assume rather than to know. Charles's reliance on the form of letters, which is in fact a form of first-person narration, serves the purpose of hiding from a confrontation with reality in a desperate gesture to protect the products of his ego through the comforting fantasies he has about himself, and can be classified as a sophistic trick. As Bradley Pearson, another first-person narrator, observes, "A letter is a barrier, a reprieve, a charm against the world, an almost infallible method of acting at a distance. (And, it must be admitted, of passing the buck.) It is a way of bidding the time to stop" (*The Black Prince* 63). A letter, in other words, is a sophistic trick which allows

distancing oneself from the other human being because it is less direct than other modes of communication, like for instance a real-life conversation. The Murdochean characters of the sophists, who purposefully resort to this tool, often endow it with a malicious motive power and use it to bring about drama, to cause upheaval. Bradley's description of this peculiar feature of letters supports this observation: "I invest letters with magical power. To desiderate something in a letter is, I often irrationally feel, tantamount to bringing it about" (*The Black Prince* 62).

Murdoch's use of the first-person narration, reminiscent of the sophist monologues, encourages us to search for contradictions or signs of discrepancy between the lofty ideals expressed by the narrators and the actual actions performed by the characters in question. Because first-person narrators do not participate in a dialogue, their opinions cannot be objectively tested for validity. They do not have any counterweight which would provide credibility to the reasoning. The view of the world presented by a first-person narrator gives unmistakably a distorted picture of reality and is full of rhetorical devices the narrator uses to influence his audience and which, ironically, often backfire on him. The same rhetorical traps he employs create a dangerous net of lies which enslave reason and prevent it from intellectual development. The more secluded and separated from others and limited to his own fantasies the character is, the further away from learning truth about reality he ends up. Without a sage, a teacher, or simply another person who can force such characters to reevaluate their views, they remain immersed in their own ignorance. The lack of human company providing critical judgment leads to the spread of fantasies. Truth dwells in dialogue, as Murdoch observes: "truth (relation to the timeless) exists for incarnate beings only in immediate consciousness, in live dialectic, writing is precisely a way of absenting oneself from truth and reality" ("Fire and the Sun" 405).

Among Murdoch's artistically gifted sophists we will find not only narcissistic failed men but also equally self-centred women.<sup>43</sup> Emma Sands in *An Unofficial Rose* is a popular female writer. Many years ago she was involved in a romantic affair with Hugo Peronett, who at that time was married to Fanny Peronett. Although Hugo was extremely fond of Emma, eventually he decided to stay with his wife. The betrayal was an offence Emma never forgot nor forgave. We meet her when she attempts to recreate the dramatic events from the past using the next generation of the Peronett family as her puppets. Emma testifies: "I had the

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<sup>43</sup> Murdoch rarely casts women in the role of sophists. Apart from Emma, also the character of garrulous Antonia, a wife of Martin Lynch-Gibbon in *A Severed Head* with her "roots in Bloomsbury" is a notable example of a female sophist.

beautiful idea of swindling my way into your family via your descendants! I thought it would be marvellously confusing” (*An Unofficial Rose* 268). The history repeats itself, or to be more precise, is revived by Emma, when she purposefully entangles Randall Peronett, Hugo’s son, in a love affair with Lindsay, her own protégé. Although Randall is married to Anna, due to Emma’s efforts he and Lindsay engage in a love affair that threatens his marriage. Randall falls for Lindsay because Emma takes extraordinary precautions to prepare the young lady so that she would appeal to the tastes of the prospective suitor. She puts her into the role of *princess lointaine*, which she knew would stimulate Randall’s imagination.

Additionally, using her authority and skilful rhetoric, Emma has the ability to control the situation. She is portrayed as the towering image, the master mind behind the whole masquerade that treats the people surrounding her like toys. She joins with Randall in flattering Lindsay and with Lindsay in teasing Randall. She makes it appear that everything had been decided, had been arranged, by her. Randall, a character in her mini-drama, suspects that Emma’s ‘play’ is only “an appearance, a cheap magician’s trick” yet is unable to break the spell (*An Unofficial Rose* 174). All characters participating in Emma’s love games are taken in by the images she carefully puts in front of them and readily play the roles she assigns them. Emma Sands bears some resemblance to the protagonist of Jane Austen’s novel *Emma*, as she is described as “a matchmaker” (*An Unofficial Rose* 188) but compared to Austen’s Emma she is far less benevolent and more successful in executing her devious plan.

In Murdoch’s fiction Emma is one of the earliest examples of investing a fictitious writer with the characteristics of a sophist. What becomes the permanent feature in Murdoch’s rendition of the sophistic tradition is the use of imagery in her description of sophist characters. Those who like Emma have the power to influence are usually endowed with a set of characteristics that present them as special and unique. Maria Jędrzejkiewicz claims that the term which in Murdoch’s novels is used to denote the mysterious, magnetic, but also negative aspect of the power to influence other people is called ‘magic’. The magical influence of one human being on another is manifested in the effect which evades a rational explanation because it is rooted in illusion sustained, often subconsciously, by both sides (*Perspektywa etyczna* 128 – 129).<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> The fragment is a paraphrase of the following fragment in Polish: „Pojęciem, które w powieściach pisarki określa tajemniczy, magnetyczny i zarazem negatywny aspekt władzy nad ludźmi i wpływu na nich jest ‘magia’. ‘Magiczny’ wpływ jednej osobowości ludzkiej na drugą objawia się oddziaływaniem, którego nie da się wyjaśnić racjonalnie, oparte jest bowiem na iluzji, w podtrzymaniu której współdziałają, przynajmniej podświadomie, obydwie strony” (*Perspektywa etyczna* 128 – 129).



When a sophist uses his/her skills the act resembles putting a spell thus Murdoch's rendition of the whole process relies heavily on the vocabulary referring to magical practices. The power of the sophist is often mythologized or fictionalized by those who experience it. Emma, for instance, is said to use "witchery" (*An Unofficial Rose* 58). The vocabulary employed by Murdoch to describe the sophistic powers refers to cultural representations of the supernatural, thus in her novels we will find allusions to all kinds of wizards, witches, enchanters and even gods from ancient mythologies. To describe the skills of the sophists and reveal their deceptive nature she refers to all types of phenomena, which usually belong to the fictional world. The writer's vocabulary emphasizes the uniqueness and colourfulness of the sophist's personality while mirroring the alluring nature of their discourse.

Kane draws attention to the fact that the odd combination of the moral and the macabre seems to be an intriguing phenomenon that has emerged in the fiction of several post-war British authors: "Demonic personalities dominate fiction charged with strong didactic currents. Searching for the good within the realm of grotesque, Iris Murdoch, Muriel Spark, and John Fowles make significant moral statements by using a variety of demonic elements" (11). Murdoch's sophists, the embodiments of dangerous or potentially destructive ideas, indeed are endowed with the qualities that link them with a fantasy world. However, it is important to mention that in Murdoch's portrayal the fantastic features ascribed to such characters by the gullible followers are nothing else than misconceptions, the projections of the fantasy-ridden Egos, and not permanent features of the character's personality.

Apart from raising our suspicion towards the sophist-like artists like Bradley Pearson or Charles Arrowby, Murdoch makes it her goal to educate her readers on how they can detect traces of manipulation and deceit. This is to be done through careful analysis of their attitude, their moral outlook and their manner of conveying the message.

## **II.2.ii Characters of psychoanalysts**

Yet another group of contemporary sophists that emerges in Murdoch's fiction is comprised of characters that are psychoanalysts. What do the ancient wandering teachers have in common with popular therapists? The answer to this question can be found in Murdoch's non-fictional essays, like "The Idea of Perfection". From the essay we learn that the author was openly sceptical towards psychoanalysis, the reason being its inaccuracy in depicting the inner

life of an individual. This scepticism is expressed in Murdoch's critique of Professor Hampshire's theory of human nature as presented in *Thought and Action*, the work which propounds the intentionalist theory.<sup>45</sup> Hampshire, who drew inspiration from psychoanalysis, argued that by cautious recognition of all the psychological forces underlying his/her motivations, a person is able to exercise some rational control over these forces and has a true freedom of action. Murdoch rejects Hampshire's stance that an individual is able to survey objectively his/her action. Moreover, she dismisses the possibility that the third party, familiar with the genetic and social conditioning of the subject, is able to extract a complete picture of the subject's motivations and actions. Murdoch justifies her polemic with Hampshire's concepts in the following way: "The analyst is pictured as somehow 'there', as the ultimate competent observer playing the part of the eye of God" ("Idea of Perfection" 320). Starting with pointing out the flaws in Hampshire's conceptual system she continues to ask:

Why should some unspecified psychoanalyst be the measure of all things? Psychoanalysis is a muddled embryonic science, and even if it were not, there is no argument that I know of that can show us that we have got to treat its concepts fundamental. The notion of 'ideal analysis' is a misleading one. There is no existing series the extension of which could lead to such an ideal. ("Idea of Perfection" 320)

Similar distrust towards psychoanalysis is expressed in her other essay entitled "On 'God' and 'Good'", where Murdoch argues: "'Self-knowledge', in the sense of a minute understanding of one's own machinery, seems to me, except at a fairly simple level, usually a delusion. A sense of such self-knowledge may of course be induced in analysis for therapeutic reasons, but 'the cure' does not prove the alleged knowledge genuine" ("On 'God' and 'Good'" 355).

As has been argued above, Murdoch strongly opposes the idea that one can have an objective picture of oneself. Consequently, she ascribes this conviction to the characters that are deluded and live in a morally grey zone. Looking for answers in one's own consciousness produces a falsified and incomplete picture of one's own existence. The practice of psychoanalysis, relying on incomplete data, according to Murdoch, essentially produces opinions and shadows, and resembles a dangerous game of guessing, which unfortunately people tend to accept unconditionally. Psychoanalysis as a science that attempts to explain behaviour, motivation, and in general every minute aspect of the decision-making process, seems to Murdoch an inadequate tool.

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<sup>45</sup> Stuart Hampshire (1 October 1914 – 13 June 2004) was an Oxford University philosopher who rejected the concept of a universal moral standard.

In spite of her rejection of psychoanalysis as a method used to decipher the complexity of a human being, Murdoch recognizes the validity of the thoroughly pessimistic Freudian view of human nature. In her essay “On ‘God’ and ‘Good’” she acknowledges the importance of Freud:

He sees the psyche as an egocentric system of quasi-mechanical energy, largely determined by its own individual history, whose natural attachments are sexual, ambiguous, and hard for the subject to understand or control. Introspection reveals only deep tissue of ambivalent motive, and fantasy is a stronger force than reason. Objectivity and unselfishness are not natural to human beings. (“On ‘God’ and ‘Good’” 341)

Murdoch relies heavily on Freud’s ideas, and the symbol of fire in her remodelling of the Platonic cave takes the pattern of Freud’s depiction of the Ego. It is worth emphasizing, however, that Freud’s view constitutes only a part of Murdoch’s Neoplatonic model. She deploys Freud’s imagery but remains Platonic in her overall vision of human nature, the idea which is expressed in her essay “The Fire and the Sun”:

Plato often speaks of the soul as being sick and in need of therapy. Both Plato and Freud wish to heal by promoting awareness of reality. Only Freud holds that we grasp reality through the ego and not through the ‘critical punishing agency’ of the ideal; whereas Plato holds that, above a reasonable egoism, there is a pure moral faculty which discerns the real world and to which sovereignty properly belongs. (“Fire and the Sun” 418)

Embracing some of Freud’s claims concerning the Ego, while simultaneously rejecting psychoanalysis as the science capable of explaining the complexity of human actions, Murdoch makes an interesting portrayal of the practitioners of psychoanalysis, which evokes associations with the sophistic activities.

Take, for instance, Murdoch’s portrayal of Blaise Gavender, who appears in *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*. Blaise is a therapist whom the narrator describes in the following way: “He knew that he was some sort of charlatan” (*The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* 20). Following in the footsteps of his sophist predecessors Blaise secretly takes pleasure in his privileged position: “Of course he enjoyed power; all meddlers with the mind enjoy that” (*The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* 20). Despite the fact that Blaise professes to be an expert on human nature he is completely deluded and unaware of the influence his own secret urges have on his actions.

In the novel it is hinted that Blaise has some unusual sexual preferences: “Blaise had known ever since boyhood that he had certain peculiarities. [...] Human minds, including the minds of geniuses and saints, are given to the creation of weird and often repulsive fantasies” (*The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* 70). However, as a psychoanalyst who professionally deals with the machinery of the mind, he naively believes that he is in control of his actions: “He was thoroughly mentally healthy. He was not going to develop any of those precise needs which lead ultimately into the little cupboard [...] He *knew* all about it” (*The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* 70). In spite of his professed omnipotence, to fulfil his dark needs Blaise engages in an extramarital affair with Emily, a complete opposite of his good and classy wife. He is completely enslaved, addicted to the presence of Emily in his life, which results in years of living a double life.

The most important characteristic of the sophist displayed by Blaise is his epistemic limitation. Compared with Socrates, who humbly declares that he ‘knows that he knows nothing’, the sophists as portrayed by Plato are relatively proud of the knowledge and expertise they possess. In Murdoch’s portrayal of Blaise the author shows that, although sophists have the power to enslave and affect negatively their surroundings, their own understanding of the situation is always very limited. Blaise, wielding the power to change the lives of two women, remains blinded and overpowered by his own needs. He becomes a victim of his own unawareness and arrogance.

In *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* Murdoch illustrates how a writer and a psychoanalyst cooperate together to keep Blaise’s wife, Harriet, in the dark. The power of the word, both written and spoken, is shown to control the third party, to feed her with illusions and eventually to induce her forgiveness for the betrayal. Sophists typically use well-arranged words in order to persuade. Therefore, to placate his wife and present the situation in the most favourable light for Blaise, his friend Montague Small advises him to reveal the affair in a letter. Angela Hague in her interpretation of Murdoch’s novel entitled *Iris Murdoch: Comic Vision* observes: “The letter, when finally written, is filled with outright lies and false presentations of his past and present relationship with Emily Hugh” (65).

Eleven years after the publication of *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* Murdoch offered a different strategy to familiarize us with sophistic tricks. In *The Good Apprentice* the author involves two sophists in a conflict. She portrays a struggle between the two men, Harry the writer and Thomas the psychoanalyst, to win over the affection of a certain lady, and the

struggle enables us to see clearly the similarities between different ideas the two men represent. We learn that Thomas McCaskerville and Harry Cuno have known each other for a long time. In their characterization the author gives the hints concerning the distinct natures of the two adversaries: “They’re chalk and cheese, Thomas an oriental Celt and Harry some kind of archetypal Englishman, two men with absolutely different kinds of minds who fascinate each other” (*The Good Apprentice* 35).

Despite the evident differences in their appearance and ideology, both men remain important sources of influence, reminding us of the sophists. They both have the power to manipulate with their speech but are equally unqualified to do it. Thomas in his contacts with his patients and family relies too much on his ‘knowledge’ of the sterile mechanics of human brain. Thomas admits that “On bad days he felt he was a charlatan” (*The Good Apprentice* 81) and presents himself as “a professional meddler” (*The Good Apprentice* 149). Like Blaise Gavender, Thomas displays the unhealthy need to control those who are weaker or disadvantaged, the patients who come asking for his help. The power he wields gives him a false conviction that he is in a privileged position, where he is needed and wanted, where he plays the role of a saviour: “Thomas had to admit that the idea of such a collapse interested him; he was already imaging himself coming to the rescue” (*The Good Apprentice* 149).

Self- delusions validating a therapist’s existence and pleasure taken in wielding power are not the only side effects of practising psychoanalysis which Murdoch emphasizes. What is disturbing in the portrayal of Thomas is the fact that his patients become for him the subjects for his dangerous experiments with human psyche, the practice which excites him and turns in his case into a small addiction: “He felt he was beginning to need his patients, and this was dangerous” (*The Good Apprentice* 72). The dark powers of mind with which Thomas likes to play, as Murdoch on numerous occasions stresses, are ambiguous, thus potentially dangerous: “Wild guesses propelled by the secret wishes of the guesser, could initiate long journeys down wrong tracks” (*The Good Apprentice* 496). Thomas, however, though aware that the treatment he prescribes gambles with the lives of his patients, admits that this is precisely what gives him pleasure: “[...] I have to, I do it daily, trying to make benignant allies out of the most dangerous things of the world [...] I have to play this dangerous game, because I am that sort

of healer, and –oh heavens- because I love it! *Flectere sie nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo*”(The Good Apprentice 150).<sup>46</sup>

By meddling with these dangerous powers Thomas is losing his sense of moral direction, a characteristic he shares with the other sophist, Harry. Harry is a son of a great artist and an author himself. Like the sophists who were only pseudo-teachers, Harry is presented as a half-artist, a bad artist, not only less successful than his father, but also an artist who fails to convey a truthful picture of reality, both in professional career and private life. Harry constantly misuses his artistic skills to fictionalize events. He imposes on the reality forms and structures that are incongruent with the actual state of affairs in order to present the latter in the most favourable light from his perspective. Harry’s semi-deliberate sophistic practices are evident in his tendency to model his private life into a plot of a romance; by doing so he behaves like a sophist who exploits his gift of imagination and fluent speech to achieve his goal, to produce persuasion.

Harry’s passionate talk addressing his mistress, Chloe, echoes the most memorable romantic confessions and love lines we know from literary works but at the same time is calculated to serve as a tool of control. To prevent Chloe’s departure and sustain the romantic liaison Harry offers his lover numerous ‘magical objects’ as we may call the dreams of their future together, the plans impossible to fulfil, the appealing but futile promises. The magical objects offered by the sophist have the value similar to the shadows displayed on the wall of the Platonic cave, because they are deceiving images that appeal to the fantasy-ridden Ego rather than to reason and by doing so prevent one from making spiritual progress. The image of romantic life that Harry builds before his lover turns out to be a hollow and formulaic vision made of empty colourful images and literary clichés.

The portrayal of Harry, the failed romantic lover and equally unsuccessful author, serves Murdoch to comment on the impotency of the moral relativism but also to question the validity of the “Enlightened, Romantic and Liberal tradition” in general. The unfavourable portrait of Harry the writer, whose poverty of imagination results in the re-enactment of the romantic plots, echoes Murdoch’s ideas expressed in her essay “Against Dryness”. In the

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<sup>46</sup> The Latin phrase Thomas uses to explain his motives appears in Freud’s *Interpretation of Dreams* and is a quotation from Virgil’s *Aeneid*. It voices the destructive conviction that one can bend the higher powers to one’s own will. The attitude echoes also Stuart Hampshire’s philosophy expounded in *Freedom of the Individual*, with which Murdoch openly disagreed.

essay the author emphasizes the inaccuracy of the picture of man, the heir of that tradition, as well as the inaccuracy of its literary representations. Murdoch points out that so called formulaic, 'dry' literature, unable of conceiving widely or complexly enough about the totality of human experience is a dangerous source of influence. Harry being the 'heir' of this tradition epitomizes the bad, 'dry' artist of Murdoch's age, the anti-hero whom the author seeks to replace.

When the two sophists are finally confronted with reality, they are forced to test the validity of their beliefs. The infidelity of his wife makes Thomas realize his utmost helplessness in the face of the situation. He learns that he has been conceited believing that everything is under his control.

He felt that his general understanding of human psychology had broken down. When individual mind is concerned the light of science can reveal so little; and the mishmash of scientific ideas and mythology and literature and isolated facts and sympathy and intuition and love and appetite for power which was known as psychoanalysis, and which did sometimes 'help people' could make the most extraordinary mistakes [...]. (*The Good Apprentice* 496)

Harry, who like Thomas has been convinced that his mistress is under his control, realizes that his love slips away from his embraces and that his great romantic affair was as real as the plot of a cheap romance. In the presentation of their conflict, the role of Chloe is especially emphasized by the author. The apple of discord between the two men, she seems to be objectified by both sophists, who treat the beloved woman like a valuable property, the work of art they both would like to possess. Initially, Chloe's passiveness, the lack of any critical judgment, and especially the lack of any moral backbone, turns her into a slavish victim of sophistic manoeuvres, passed from one source of influence to another. The situation changes when Stuart, the epitome of good in the Platonic sense, appears in Chloe's life and she is magnetically pulled towards the third source of influence. Stuart, representing a moral alternative for the sophistic tricks, considers "goodness as the most important thing" (*The Good Apprentice* 31). He is a continuator of the Socratic ideal and a character whom Murdoch uses to provide a counterweight to the ideological programs offered by Harry and Thomas, allowing Chloe to seriously re-evaluate her actions.

The psychoanalysts portrayed by Murdoch, like the sophists, offer an inaccurate picture of reality, the content which we can call a free 'interpretation' of what stems from the depths of consciousness. The analysts are placed next to the writers who are immersed in the

state of *eikasia*. They do not have access to the world of *becoming*, to the knowledge. Moreover, despite the fact that they are fully aware of their limitations and incapacity to perform what they profess to do, they often deliberately continue with their practice, ignoring the hypocrisy inscribed in their actions. Both sophists and psychoanalysts display considerable epistemic limitations evident in the nature of the ‘knowledge’ they spread. The problem which Murdoch emphasizes most ardently is the fact that a psychoanalyst wields power over other people who trust him with their mental health, and the power, as every source of influence in her fiction, is portrayed as potentially corrupting. Fascination and attachment to the position of power is, according to the writer, the reason why the discussions between psychoanalysts and their patients, although dialogical in nature, fail. The therapy, itself based on dialogue and an interview which frames the analyst-patient relationship, reminds us of the question-answer procedure known from Plato’s dialogues. However, despite being controlled by a figure with limited understanding, the exchange never produces the outcomes similar to those of dialectical procedure, the reason being that the figure of authority is only a sophist, not a real dialectician.

The examples of ‘dry’, failed artists and incompetent psychoanalysts discussed above are only a few among numerous instances of sophistic characters that an insightful reader will find in Murdoch’s fiction. After careful analysis of characterization in Murdoch’s fiction, the modern sophists in her portrayal amount to pseudo-experts, the charlatans professing the position of authorities but not endowed with any substantial knowledge of the surrounding reality and, most importantly, unable to recognize their own ignorance. What they all have in common is the destructive reliance on the simplified and thus inadequate pictures of experience in the form of misleading ideas or concepts that, according to Murdoch, need to be critically assessed.

### **II.3 The use of dialectical practice and dialogue in Iris Murdoch’s novels**

According to Plato, for proper communication to take place interlocutors must have a good will, sincerity, and be ready to drop the masks of social convention; they are not to be hampered by inhibitions and by the false shame to contradict oneself before a large audience. This idea is expressed in *Gorgias*: “I have noticed that anyone who is to form a right judgment whether the soul is living well or the reverse must have three qualities (...) understanding, good will and readiness to be perfectly frank” (*Gorgias* 83, Murdoch’s emphasis). As Socrates observes, it does not really matter whether the interlocutors display



high or low moral standards as long as they are ready to participate in a dialogue; all false assumptions are bound to vanish in the dialectical purge of a real conversation.

In Murdoch's fiction it is noticeable that the care with which she constructs the dialogic passages not only stands in direct opposition to the deceptive discourse of the sophists but also is the author's attempt to mirror the dialectical practice for the purpose of inviting the reader to a meaningful debate.

Philip Hensher in the introduction to *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* emphasizes the special quality of the dialogical exchange that takes place in Murdoch's novel:

At a fundamental level, the discussions sound like Platonic dialogues of a rather rococo tinge, and not much like two ladies talking. It's always noticeable that once the characters embark on the subject of ethics, the novelist's awareness of the setting of the conversation rapidly evaporates. No one ever talks about the Virtuous Life, while pruning the roses; the voices fall into a physical vacuum. (*A Fairly Honourable Defeat* xv)

The remark about the 'artificiality' of the conversation, which turns from a seemingly casual chat into a serious moral debate, is valid with reference not only to the discussions in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*. On numerous occasions Murdoch seems to be inspired and influenced by Plato's dialectics preserved in the form of dialogue because she retrieves in her fiction many of its features.

Take for instance the subject matter of these conversations. In Murdoch's reinterpretation of Plato's dialogues an important role is allotted to the issues of moral value echoing the topics discussed by Socrates. As pointed out by Hensher, these serious topics sometimes seem almost out of place in Murdoch's novels, often classified as romances for intellectuals, but still romances. I would argue that the plots, frequently revolving around the problems of married couples, of first loves and affairs, constitute a familiar background or rather a pretext for the author to start up some real conversations. The reader's familiarity with the old themes allows Murdoch to introduce more advanced content, demonstrating that philosophical reflection is never far away from the fibre of our lives, the drama of interpersonal relations.

A key feature of Plato's dialogues that is preserved in Murdoch's 'dialectical conversations' is a carefully planned narrative situation where the chief speaker is a wise dialectician. In Plato's dialogues it is Socrates, with a few exceptions, who is placed in the

role of a sage conducting a question-answer interview with different types of interlocutors. His chief adversaries are of course sophists like Protagoras or Gorgias, whose views he relentlessly tries to correct or prove wrong. Yet, apart from acting in opposition to the sophists, Socrates is portrayed by Plato as a teacher surrounded by his young followers to whom he hands down his knowledge, or rather his method of discovering and obtaining knowledge. Rationalist though he is, Socrates plays the role among his followers like that of a Zen master or an Indian guru:

For Plato, and for Socrates as Plato represents him, the commitment to philosophy is conceived as something comparable to a religious conversion, the turning of the soul from the shadows to the light. This involves a radical restructuring of the personality in its values and priorities, the kind of psychic transformation which the mystics of the East call enlightenment. (Kahn 273)

The unquestioned position of Socrates as the source of authority is clear in the *Symposium*, where the first narrator, Apollodorus, a recent convert to philosophy and a daily companion of Socrates, openly regards everyone he meets as miserable human beings but claims that Socrates is the exception to this rule.

The portrayal of the philosopher in *Apology* presents Socrates as a teacher figure inspiring admiration, awe and devotion in his pupils. The meaning of the word ‘teacher’, however, should be used with caution. Socrates himself seems to be very reluctant to admit that he is a teacher. In other words, he denies any affinity with the class of popular teachers represented by the sophists and wants to distinguish himself from their kind. As Alan Scott observes: “He does not teach by means of an exposition that aims to persuade or demonstrate, in the manner of Protagoras” (16).

Even though Socrates officially rejects the label of a teacher, he is followed around by different types of people. Among the people Socrates inspires Scott distinguishes two kinds of followers, the so called imitators and the disciples. The disciples are self-appointed understudies who copy the philosopher’s mannerisms and lifestyle and seem most passionate about Socrates’s practice of philosophy. The imitators, on the other hand, are said to mimic Socrates’s technique of cross-examination with some success. They are portrayed as betraying the signs of real intellectual development initiated by the Socratic method. As Scott observes, “Whether or not Socrates intends to *teach* them anything, this group of followers seems to have learned something from its frequent association with the philosopher, and seems to have become quite skilled at the refutational part of Socrates’ approach” (21). Socrates remains

unwilling to accept his role as a teacher yet the example of his imitators, who successfully implement his method for their own use, testifies to his merits as a pedagogue. The chief accomplishment of his technique is visible in the awakening of these young minds, who acquire after Socrates the critically-oriented spirit, more willing to ask questions than obediently accept answers.

Although constantly rejecting his role as authority, Socrates is presented by Plato as the one who always has the upper hand over his interlocutors, not only in the intellectual sense but more importantly in the moral dimension. Szlezák observes that in all the dialogues there is a noticeable difference in the levels of philosophical development between the person in charge of conducting the dialogue and his interlocutor (13).<sup>47</sup> Despite the fact that Socrates wants to remain on equal terms with his followers and emphasizes the fact that he will look with them for answers, his emphasis on the equality in dialogue should be understood rather as an ideal rather than a real description of a situation. As Szlezák observes, though, the suggested equality should be taken seriously rather as a strategy because in Plato's dialogues it is a dialectician who holds all cards (17).<sup>48</sup> Socrates guides the conversation in a direction suitable for his argument and actually expresses his superiority by his knowledge of the world of transcendence but is always careful to adjust himself to the level of his interlocutor and restrains from indoctrination, which makes his attitude different from the sophist's. Szlezák observes that the method of conducting the dialogue is always adapted to the level of the interlocutor's spiritual maturity. The dialogue contains a method of reasoning closely related to the recipient, i.e. esoteric. This explains also the tendency to dramatic individualization. In his search for the right interlocutor the dialectician must not ignore their individual circumstances and specifics which, in a way, hinder them from joining in philosophical practice (Szlezák 23).<sup>49</sup>

The echoes of the educational relationship Socrates shares with some of his followers can be traced in *The Good Apprentice*, a novel in which the problem of education understood as responsible guidance seems to be an important subject. The characters in the novel enter in

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<sup>47</sup> "We wszystkich dialogach jest widoczna różnica poziomów filozoficznego rozwoju osoby prowadzącej dialogi i jej partnera" (Szlezák 13).

<sup>48</sup> „Sugerowaną równorzędność należałoby brać serio raczej jako program” (Szlezák 17).

<sup>49</sup> „Sposób prowadzenia dialogu jest dostosowany zawsze do duchowej dojrzałości partnera; dialog zawiera sposób filozofowania ściśle odniesiony do adresata, tj. ezoteryczny. Tłumaczy to także dążność do dramatycznej indywidualizacji. [...] Dialektyk nie może w swym poszukiwaniu właściwych partnerów abstrahować od ich indywidualnych uwarunkowań i specyfiki, na różne sposoby utrudniających im wstępowanie w filozofię” (Szlezák 23).

the relationships that evoke interactions portrayed by Plato in his dialogues. Take for instance the relation that is formed between Stuart, a character who very much resembles an ‘ideal teacher’, and Meredith, a much younger boy who in times of trouble turns to Stuart for guidance.

In Stuart’s characterization Murdoch preserves the features Plato ascribes to an ideal dialectician. Stuart is established as a graduate student with distinguished honours in mathematics, offered a coveted teaching post at a London college, but he announces that he is leaving the academic world in order to do ‘social work’. The nature of his occupation is vague and yet to be clarified because we meet Stuart at the moment the idea is only crystallizing and when he becomes aware that the only thing that matters is doing good deeds. Stuart aspires to become a Good Samaritan, to help people, but is still moderately confused as far as the method of this help is concerned.

One of Stuart’s main concerns is of course communication with those in need. He reflects: “Suppose it should turn out that he could never really communicate with other human beings at all? He had so far communicated very little. So did he not envisage himself *talking* to people in the future, *advising* them? Could something like this be learnt or did it have to be a natural endowment” (*The Good Apprentice* 52). The echo of Plato’s dilemma concerning the application of dialectics as the method conducive to education seems remotely audible in Stuart’s deliberations. Although not entirely certain as how to embark on his task of bringing about the good into the lives of other people, he resolves that the best starting point is “To go on learning, that’s the point! One thing I think I’ve learnt is how to learn” (*The Good Apprentice* 138). Interestingly, after a conversation with Thomas, a psychoanalyst and skilful user of words, Stuart displays certain doubts about the productivity of talk as a tool for communication. He feels that “things can be spoilt when talked about” (*The Good Apprentice* 147). Stuart displays an awareness that words are fallible, that communication relying solely on language is a dangerous game of appearances. He sees in practice how words can be used to manipulate, how freely their meaning is interpreted, how they can be used to convey a false image of the reality. Despite the recognized limitations of verbal communication, Stuart realizes that conversation, even with an interlocutor like Thomas, “helped him to clear his thoughts” (*The Good Apprentice* 147).

Aware of the double-edged potential of words and conversation in general, Stuart influences all people he approaches by talking to them, by entering in meaningful dialogues.

He becomes ‘apprenticed to good’ (*The Good Apprentice* 138), the embodiment of good, who with his unwavering moral stance provokes those in his surroundings to reflect on their behaviour. His idea of a good moral life is very simple and comes down to a simple rule: ‘avoid evil at all cost’. Do not flirt with it, do not try to tame it, and do not use half-measures with evil. Stuart sees “the machine of life that hardens the ego - sex, drink, ambition, pride, cupidity, soft living – he sees it as one big unitary trap, and his simple plan is not to enter it at all” (*The Good Apprentice* 208).

Like Socrates in Plato’s dialogues, Stuart becomes an exemplar against which the moral actions of the remaining characters are measured. Murdoch puts the character like Stuart in front of us to use him as the point of reference or a moral compass. The role is evident right from the start, in a conversation devoted to the issue of pornography. The conversation serves the purpose of introducing the main ideological conflict of the novel and ominously informs the reader about the causes of the given characters’ fall. When discussing the issue of corrupting the youth and the role of pornography in their lives, compared with the rather liberal ideas exchanged among the guests, Stuart’s opinion is uncompromising:

Pornography isn’t compulsory; people can recognize what’s bad and keep away from it. [...] What children get used to and regard as permissible at an early age can weaken all their moral defenses, it’s an early training in cynicism, and as deep and as lasting as any other training. It’s not a bit like vaccination, it’s more like acquiring an incurable virus, something that degrades and corrupts, and the corruption of the children is an *abomination*. (*The Good Apprentice* 32)

Stuart’s role, summarized in the declaration quoted above, comes down to preventing the spread of corruption in his surroundings, he is therefore the one who by remaining firm and faithful to his ideas saves young Meredith from becoming a cynic.

Meredith, a child of thirteen, is described as a rather solemn, “upright, self-contained and soldierly” (*The Good Apprentice* 21) adolescent, at a particular moment in life, “not innocent but not evil either” (*The Good Apprentice* 149). When Meredith learns about his mother’s affair, he is forced to face a potentially corrupting event. The situation complicates even further when his mother asks him to keep quiet about the discovery. Facing a moral dilemma, the lad decides to discuss the problem with Stuart. Ironically, due to Stuart’s sudden ‘conversion’ to a moral ascetic lifestyle, Meredith’s mother has been afraid that Stuart may exert a bad influence on the boy, the situation being analogous to the predicament of Socrates, falsely accused of corrupting the youth. In spite of this rather unfavourable picture of Stuart

‘the liberated adults’ in his surroundings may have, Meredith instinctively chooses him as his guide in the time of trouble. The boy testifies: “You’re the only person that I know who’s not messy” (*The Good Apprentice* 249).

In a scene, taking place at the British Museum, “a place of light and wisdom, floating like a great liner on that dark sea” (*The Good Apprentice* 248), Stuart meets with Meredith to provide him with his guidance. Stuart, the older and wiser friend, is portrayed as Meredith’s ‘advisor’, who carefully and resolutely attempts to answer the questions asked by the troubled young man. Interestingly, he is not flattered by the power invested in him by the boy. Instead, he takes his task as a responsibility and swears to himself: “I mustn’t ever disappoint Meredith” (*The Good Apprentice* 249). They meet in the Parthenon frieze room of the British Museum and discuss the importance of telling the truth, the conversation which will be salutary for Meredith’s mental health. The ‘ancient’ surroundings remind us of Plato’s influence. Not only the circumstances evoke Plato’s dialogues, also the subject of the conversation, revolving around values, evokes the scenes described by Plato. Stuart is the one who opposes early signs of Meredith’s corruption, manifest in the statement, “Everything is permitted, and nothing matters” (*The Good Apprentice* 252), with a firm belief that “some things don’t matter too much, other things matter absolutely” (*The Good Apprentice* 252) and this establishment of hierarchy where goodness dominates, and is clearly separated from evil, becomes a moral signpost for the young man which turns him back from thoughtless hedonism. Stuart’s final statement, “Our courage and desire to do good are tested every day” (*The Good Apprentice* 249), finally pushes the boy in the right direction, and saves him from ‘going mad’ at the age of thirteen.

Another source of authority that exercises good influence in Murdoch’s novels and enters in conversations resembling dialectical practice is Tallis. Appearing in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* Tallis is a lecturer in social science and a charitable social worker. Although he himself is living in relative poverty, he is always preoccupied with helping his community first, firmly believing that “Teaching people is useful” (*A Fairly Honourable Defeat* 267). Although the task is sometimes overwhelming and exhausting, he optimistically glorifies the meetings claiming that during the teaching sessions he has with his students “jolly good discussions” (*A Fairly Honourable Defeat* 267).

Tallis is looked down on by most of the characters in the novel and considered weak and indecisive. He is labelled as a person with a feeble character whose own wife left him.

The weakness and the lack of resolution ascribed to Tallis turns out to be a serious misjudgement. Compared with the rest of the characters in the novel, it is Tallis who in some crucial moments is capable of performing a meaningful action, of doing something morally good. As Elizabeth Dipple observes, “The first occurs in a Chinese restaurant where a defenceless black man is being worked over by a gang of brutal white thugs. [...] Tallis steps forward to slap the leader with tremendous force, breaking the spell of violence and putting an abrupt stop to the evil being enacted” (*Work for the Spirit* 21). Because of Tallis’s ability to ‘see’ clearly what is right and wrong, to see through the ‘muddle’, he has the potential to become a positive role model for the younger Peter.

Peter is a troubled lad who insists on dropping out from Cambridge and lives in a sort of moral haze. For Peter “[Cambridge] incarnates that whole rotten set of beastly old class values” (*A Fairly Honourable Defeat* 63). The traditional sources of authority, namely Peter’s parents, want to send him back to Cambridge, arguing that “what you need, my boy, is a little philosophical training. [...] Now education is something which is genuinely valuable” (*A Fairly Honourable Defeat* 121) but for Peter the sort of ‘education’ offered by the university is “all hocus-pocus. It’s a sort of conspiracy. People read a lot of old authors without understanding them or even liking them, they learn a lot of facts without feeling anything about them or connecting them with anything that’s present and real, and they call that training their minds” (*A Fairly Honourable Defeat* 121).

Peter is appalled by the fact that “people feel they’ve failed unless they’re continually climbing up a sort of pyramid of material possessions” (*A Fairly Honourable Defeat* 63). Clearly in disillusionment with the moral values of the establishment, to which, however, he belongs, Peter is in a process of discovering himself anew and re-orientating his worldview. A part of the process involves the rejection of the bourgeois mentality of his parents. “Their morality is all superstition and self-interest” (*A Fairly Honourable Defeat* 107), he declares. Peter wants to live outside their ‘capitalist dream’ but his deconstruction of his parents’ moral system leads him up to the dangerous point where even the basic rules underlying society are questioned yet not replaced with any sensible alternative.

At this critical moment, when the gap between Peter and his parents is dangerously deepening and when the re-evaluation of everything is taking place, Tallis takes Peter up as his protégé and arises as an alternative source of authority in the life of the young man. Instead of allowing him to wander off the streets or being ‘indoctrinated’ behind the

university walls, he creates for him a safe environment, where he can always come back and talk freely. However, in spite of Tallis's efforts, Peter is sinking deeper and deeper into the darkness of moral relativism. He begins to steal, not understanding why the act itself is morally wrong. Engaging in a dialogue with Peter, Tallis attempts to re-socialise him. Unfortunately, due to the fact that he is clumsy with words, his good moral instinct is not able to reach the intellectually oriented young mind. The rule 'don't steal, because it's wrong' is not enough for Peter, who is yearning for an elaborate justification, not a simple moral truth. The inability to manipulate with words reflects the moral purity of Tallis because being good involves in Murdoch's portrayal a certain struggle with words that opposes the fluency of sophistic oratory. What Tallis offers to Peter is reminiscent of dialectical training compared with the other sources of authority in Peter's life. Peter's father, a man who knows ethics only in theory, provides a long sophistic speech on the subject of stealing. Julius, a clever scientist, removes the idea of stealing from a moral frame explaining its pros and cons from a utilitarian point of view. As Elizabeth Dipple observes, "Tallis offers a fascinating contrast to these two theorists in that his knowledge is spare, uncluttered, muddily or not at all explained, and yet directly on target, clear and to the point" (*Work for the Spirit* 21).

Tallis, as Peter's guide, realizes that what Peter needs at this critical point in his life is love, which would make him unselfish and redirect him back on the right track. Peter's loneliness and a need for genuine contact with another human being is evident when in an innocent but intimate scene he shares a bed together with Tallis: "They lay down together, bumping about, adjusting arms and knees in the cramped space and then were still, Peter with his face pressed into Tallis's shoulder and Tallis looking over the light cool hair into the dimness of the room. Peter could feel the demons. Tallis could see them" (*A Fairly Honourable Defeat* 108). In the description of their special relationship Murdoch captured the difference in knowledge and experience between the teacher and his pupil. Peter's knowledge of surrounding evil is only instinctive, while Tallis, who can actually see the daemons, is presented as being on a higher epistemic level than his pupil. This characterization echoes the portrayal of Socrates, always a step ahead of his interlocutor.

Among all adults listed above only Tallis deserves the name of an educator in the Platonic sense. Even though he lacks the skills to articulate his moral stance and loses to Peter in dialectical exchange of arguments, ultimately he is the most fitted to the role of a teacher who, having in mind the good interest of his pupil, advises his parents to seek professional help with Peter, because his symptoms are not merely the signs of teenage rebellion but may



portend some serious mental disorder. In Murdoch's portrayal Tallis fails in his endeavour to help Peter, but preserves his own integrity and thus remains a source of a good example and, compared to the rest of adults in Peter's life, does not disgrace himself with unworthy conduct.

In Murdoch's depiction of educational practices, especially in her portrayal of young boys like Peter or Meredith, who are exposed for corruption and are portrayed in some critical moments, Murdoch reminds us of characters created by Plato. *Laches* and *Charmides* are both dialogues that emphasize Socrates's influence on young men of distinguished families. Boys from good and respectable homes are presented in the moment of trouble, right before the corruption takes place. In *Laches*, which may be Plato's first narrated dialogue, the author is openly concerned with the problem of education that went wrong. Plato presents Critas as a relatively young man who has not begun yet his sinister political career. A similar strategy is employed in another of Plato's dialogues, *Charmides*. Plato shows Charmides, the protagonist of the dialogue, as a modest teenager of unlimited promise who by making wrong moral choices was to end up a tyrant known from a lesson in history. In the discussion on the virtue of decency and self-restraint Plato introduces two interlocutors whose later careers show that they conspicuously lacked virtues, and who died fighting against their countrymen for their own personal power. Kahn explains that by introducing them Plato makes the point that "The capacity for virtue may be inborn, as the aristocratic tradition believed, but how it develops will depend upon moral education" (187).

I argue that this is the point in which Murdoch converges with Plato's thought because the storylines of her novels very often present the 'moral adventures' of adolescents<sup>50</sup> from good families, who are endangered with the risk of falling into a chasm of immorality. Similarly to Plato, Murdoch attempts to capture the alteration in the worldview of the young that occurs during the pre-corruption state, trying to warn us about the ideas that may propel moral decay.

In *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* Murdoch presents yet another example of a relationship evocative of Plato's dialogues. Axel and Simon live in a moderately happy homoerotic relationship. Simon, characterized as a type "frivolous by nature, inconstant, evasive, impulsive and irrational" (*A Fairly Honourable Defeat* 193), finds a long-lasting

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<sup>50</sup> Take for instance Annette Cockayne (*The Flight from the Enchanter*), Toby Gashe (*The Bell*) or Pierce Clothier (*The Nice and the Good*).

partner in the person of Axel. Axel is portrayed as “a clever, dry, silent man” (*A Fairly Honourable Defeat* 21) who, compared with Simon, is mature and sophisticated. Axel refers teasingly to his younger partner as ‘a kid’, the nickname being understandable concerning the age difference between the two men: Simon is twenty-nine and Axel forty-two.

We learn that the couple met in Athens, at the National Museum near the *kouros*, the marble statue of a young boy, which became the symbol of their love. Murdoch’s depiction of their relationship reminds us of the ancient tradition of relationships between males in Greece, a relationship between an older male *erastes* and an adolescent youth *eromenos*. The role of the older man was to educate, protect, love, and provide a role model for his young protégé, the reward for him being in the boy’s beauty and youth.

The roots of this Greek arrangement lie in the tribal past of Greece and were connected with a rite of passage into manhood. When the time came for a boy to embrace the age group of the adult and to ‘become a man’, he would leave the tribe in the company of an older man for a period of time that constituted a rite of passage. This older man would educate the youth in the ways of Greek life and the responsibilities of adulthood. The relationship played an educational and instructive role in the lives of the young companions, forming a sort of social and educational institution. This form of bonding served as an important element of civil life, of the military system and of philosophy and the arts likewise. It is worth emphasizing that very often the bond was extended to embrace also the sexual aspect of the youth’s life.<sup>51</sup>

In Plato’s dialogues we find the echo of the tradition when Socrates talks flirtatiously with handsome men like Meno, when he addresses much-admired youths like Charmides and Clinias, or the beautiful boys like Lysis and Menexenus. Their presence in the Socratic dialogues is strongly linked with Plato’s concept that the access to knowledge can be granted with the help of erotic love, raising the lover to the metaphysical kingdom:

What the *Phaedo* construes in the ascetic mode as liberation from the sensory realm of the body, the *Symposium* describes in more positive terms as the education of desire, the redirection of *erōs* from bodily to moral beauty. A skilful erotic guide will use the initial triggering effect of sexual attraction (like the triggering effect of sense-perception in the *Phaedo*’s account of recollection ) in order to get the lover to see his desired object *as beautiful*, and hence as an

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<sup>51</sup> See Kenneth Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1978).

exemplar of a desirable principle that is to be found elsewhere as well.  
(Kahn 280)

The educational aspect of the romantic liaison between Axel and Simon is evident in Axel's attempts to discuss with Simon the moral rules which are supposed to lay foundations of their relationship. At the beginning of their affair Axel gives Simon 'a lecture' about jealousy: "We must trust each other and not be jealous" (*A Fairly Honourable Defeat* 22). At the beginning of their love, Axel lectures Simon also on the subject of truthfulness: "Don't tell me lies, even trivial ones, and don't conceal things from me. Love should be without fear" (*A Fairly Honourable Defeat* 23).

Murdoch constructs the plot of the novel so as to put in trial Axel's teachings and illustrate the implementation of his moral theories in practice. The character who serves the purpose of testing the strength of their love and its moral foundations is Julius. Julius, partly for fun and partly to prove his own theory about the human nature, attempts to destroy their relationship and uses Simon's gullibility. Simon, who considered himself a person with an exceptionally evasive temperament, found the injunction not to conceal anything considerably difficult to follow because he tended to tell small lies. Exploiting Simon's weakness Julius involves him in a series of situations that purposefully put the young man in a bad light. Simon faces the dilemma whether to conceal the whole mess or to admit his participation in the plan schemed by Julius. In spite of fear of being rejected by his partner, Simon, constituted by Axel's lectures, does the right thing and comes clean.

The scene near the pool symbolizes Simon's inner struggle to solve the dilemma. Julius bullies Simon and does not allow him to get out of the pool but Simon struggles to find his way out. Exhausted, nearly drowned, he objects to the abusive behaviour of Julius: "Julius not letting me get out of the pool - it suddenly made me feel that anything was better than going on in that sort of hell" (*A Fairly Honourable Defeat* 387). The pool itself becomes a symbol of falsity, of lies, of a sophistic trap which may enslave us. Simon's successful escape from the pool, on the other hand, stands for a moral victory and symbolizes the overcoming of one's own weakness.

It is worth mentioning that in Simon's victory the power of love plays an important part. If was for the fear of falling from Axel's graces that Simon hid his alliance with Julius. Only the real threat of losing his partner, suspicious of his behaviour and secrets, pushed Simon to exposing Julius's plan. With the assistance of his partner, whom he deeply loves and

respects and who is his mentor, Simon is able to mature spiritually: “He had attempted with Axel’s help, to see how base and fruitless and how damaging these black instincts really were” (*A Fairly Honourable Defeat* 151).

As portrayed by Murdoch, the relationship between the teacher and the pupil is mutually beneficial. Not only Simon’s worldview is altered by a wiser companion but also Axel’s understanding is improved. Axel, who used to publically conceal the truth about his homosexuality, realizes that concealment may lead to a disastrous end and that the rules he has taught Simon are applicable to his own moral life as well. “We shouldn’t hide so. I think if we had been living more in the open we mightn’t have been involved in this terrible muddle” (*A Fairly Honourable Defeat* 424).

The relationship between Axel and Simon creates for the author an opportunity to reinterpret the role of Eros in education, the concept which was originally presented by Plato in *Symposium*. Kahn observes that in Plato’s dialogue Eros is described as “a philosopher whose position lies between wisdom and ignorance, since he not only lacks wisdom but is conscious of his lack” (266). In Plato’s understanding Eros occupies the position ‘in between’, therefore like art is classified as an ambiguous source of influence. Due to the fact that Eros essentially links two people together, the energy called passion or fascination flows between the two bounded by its force and results in a form of non-verbal communication.

Plato describes the process in *The Republic VI*. First and foremost the rechannelling of physical desire into mental activity in process involves redirection of *rational* desire, our desire for what is good-and-beautiful onto its own proper object. Kahn observes:

The intellect plays the decisive role in this process, but its judgment as to what is good and beautiful carries with it the powerful erotic charge expressed in the hydraulic image of rechannelling. Animal appetite (*epithumia*) will remain fixed on attractive bodies. But the metaphysical yearning that is characteristic of erotic desire will be transferred upward as a consequence of greater intellectual insight. (278)

The role of Eros as a stimulus is illustrated by Murdoch in her dialogue “Above the Gods”. Plato appearing in the dialogue claims that “The soul is a huge vast place, and lots of it is dark, and it’s full of energy and power, and this can be bad, but it can be good, and that’s the work, to change bad energy into good, when we desire good things and are attracted magnetically by them” (“Above the Gods” 517). In Murdoch’s texts love in its purified form

is perceived as a powerful catalyser. If channelled properly, the energy of Eros allows a philosopher to reach the metaphysical realm.

The illustration of metaphysical journey triggered by Eros can be found for instance in *A World Child*. The protagonist, Hilary, as a child was rather strong and soon given to violence. He did the bullying, as he explains, because he hated the universe: “I wanted to cause it pain in return for the pain it caused me” (*A World Child* 19). Fortunately for him, the bully on the path to prison ward was saved by Mr Osmand, a man who taught French at Hilary’s school: “I suspect that many children are saved by saints and geniuses of this kind [...] How exactly the miracle happened is another thing which I cannot very clearly recall. Suddenly my mind woke up. Floods of light came in” (*A World Child* 21). Hilary recalls that an ability to write fluent and correct Latin prose offered him an escape from a gloomy future, because, as Hilary states, Mr Osmand “began in time to show me vistas headier and more glorious than any I had ever before known how to dream of” (*A World Child* 21).

What is important in the portrayal of the relationship between Hilary and Mr Osmand is the fact that apart from emphasizing the importance of studying foreign languages, Mr Osmand insists on Hilary’s moral development: “He wanted me, in his own old-fashioned and austere conception of it, to be good [...] Of course he chided my violence, but more profoundly, and through his very teaching, he inculcated in me a respect for accuracy, a respect, to put it more nobly, for truth” (*A World Child* 22).

Hilary grew up believing that he was his favourite and favoured pupil whom Mr Osmand regarded at first simply as a professional challenge but later certainly came to love. One of Hilary’s memories from that time captures Mr Osmand in the following way: “Mr Osmand was unmarried. His shabby sleeve often caressed my wrist, and he liked to lean his arm against mine as we looked at the same text. Nothing else ever happened. But through the glowing electrical pressure of that arm I learnt another lesson about the world” (*A World Child* 23).

Though the ways of pupil and teacher grew apart, Hilary, many years later, after accidentally eating a cake with mind-altering substance, begins to hallucinate and sees Mr Osmand in his vision:

Somehow Mr Osmand was there too in the cavern which was also the mouth which was also the unrolling light which was also me [...]. Mr Osmand was very beautiful and very funny and I loved him. *Amo*

*amas amat amamus amatis amant amavi amavisti amavit amavimus  
amavistis amaverunt amavero amaveris amaverit... Everything was  
love. Everything will be love. Everything has been love. Everything  
would be love. Everything would have been love. Ah, that was it, the  
truth at last. (A World Child 298)*

Through the Latin grammar in which he was skilled and trained by Mr Osmand, Hilary realizes that the only force in life that can bring about positive change is love. The figure of the caring teacher being a reminder of the good he has experienced leads Hilary in the direction of intellectual progress. The love he has been offered results in the revelation confirming the role of Eros as the catalyser for the enlightenment. Mr Osmand, a teacher and a figure of authority, is portrayed as a loving and caring guide who provides his pupil with two tools needed to climb up the metaphysical ladder, linguistic competence and his long-lasting affection.

The good Eros, taking the form of physical and intellectual union, allows the two people involved to evolve into a partnership, evident in their use of dialogue. Despite the differences in age or experience, both sides can benefit from it if they remain open for communication. The Socratic *logoi* can move the learner on to the third and final stage of erotic pedagogy:

Dialogue belongs to a discourse that permits both the speaker and auditor to comprehend the moral beauty of practices and laws, and thence to proceed to the intellectual beauty of the sciences, after which, beholding the great sea of beauty, he will generate many beautiful *logoi* and thoughts in unstinting love of wisdom. (Kahn 270)

The role of the teacher, morally responsible for the pupil, excludes any sort of forceful dominance; instead, it is a form of mutually beneficial cooperation. The situation is completely different when we deal with the influence of the sophist on his pupil, where their relationship is transformed into a peculiar arrangement involving the establishment of a master and slave hierarchy. In Murdoch's portrayal of Eros associated with sophist practices, instead of progress we usually witness moral debacle caused by lecherousness and inability to control the carnal desires.

Murdoch's depiction echoes Plato's account of the phenomena presented in *The Republic* VIII where Plato discusses so called oligarchic personality. The throne of the psyche is occupied by the appetitive and money-loving principle. Kahn explains: "Plato's use of the term *erōs* to designate the dominant passion in the tyrannical psyche is a reminder that the same psychic principle which, when properly guided, leads one to philosophy can also, when

totally misguided, direct a life of plunder and brutality” (Kahn 260). Inability to advance from the stage of carnal fascination to intellectual inquiry illustrates the fact that compared with a dialectician a sophist remains at a low epistemic level.

It appears that Murdoch distinguishes between egalitarian relations based on dialogue, when both sides benefit from the arrangement and when the presence of Eros is evident in a harmonious relationship between a pupil and a teacher, and an asymmetric relation, when the presence of Eros results in the pattern of master and slave.

In Murdoch’s texts Eros associated with the practices of the sophists illustrates the state of underdeveloped consciousness, the consciousness which focuses on desires instead of aspiring to knowledge. In her essay “The Fire and the Sun” Murdoch discusses the negative aspects of Eros in the following way:

Falling in love, violent process which Plato more than once vividly describes (love is abnegation, abjection, slavery) is for many people the most extraordinary and revealing experience of their lives, whereby the centre of significance is suddenly ripped out of the self, and the dreamy ego is shocked into awareness of an entirely separate reality. Love in this form may be a somewhat ambiguous instructor. Plato has admitted that Eros is a bit of a sophist. (“The Fire and the Sun” 417)

The concept of Eros and its role in education is present in one of Murdoch’s earliest novels, *The Bell*. In *The Bell* we will find two different kinds of relationships between teachers and their pupils. The relation between Toby and James Tayper Pace may serve as the epitome of Socratic-like education, whereas the relation between Michael and Nick may illustrate the sophistic training.

Toby, a boy of eighteen, and James Tayper Pace, his forty-year-old supervisor, are introduced by Murdoch on their way to Imber Court, a lay community encamped outside Imber Abbey where Toby is supposed to spend his summer before entering Oxford. According to an observer of the scene, a pair discussing the importance of hard work resemble master and pupil rather than father and son because, “there was something pedagogic about the older man” (*The Bell* 19). Indeed, in her depiction of James, Murdoch presents him as a successor of the Socratic tradition who exercises a healthy source of influence, not only on the boy, but on his religious community as well. As the member of Imber Court James promotes the idea of equality and comradeship because he strongly believes that any authority should melt in brotherly love: “When James had come, the

community immediately took shape as a corporate body. Previously it was a collection of individuals over whom Michael naturally exercised such authority” (*The Bell* 85). In his attitude towards his fellow members to readily enter in dialogue we see an echo of Socratic practices, shunning the leadership based on tyranny of an individual.

Murdoch invests in James the Socratic ideal which is mirrored in his own moral code. James believes that *suppressio veri* is an equivalent to *suggestio falsi*, the rule which he is ready to defend without compromise and the rule which he successfully reinforces for the benefit of his student. The ‘pedagogic’ influence on the young mind becomes transparent in James’s uncompromising reaction to Toby’s actions. After Toby’s arrival at Imber Court, the boy becomes entangled in a series of events disturbing his sense of moral direction. Among the events that put Toby’s conscience in trial is a rather inappropriate kiss which he shares with Michael. Michael who initiated the physical contact requests to conceal it. The muddle caused by Michael’s behaviour puts Toby in a difficult moral position where, similarly to other adolescent characters in Murdoch’s fiction, he has to decide whether to confess the truth about the event or not: “Toby was a naturally truthful boy and had been brought up to believe that whatever mess one found oneself in one could always best get out of by telling the truth. But truth-telling in this case, would be likely to prove difficult” (*The Bell* 255). After Toby’s confession, James sends the boy away to prevent any further complications and as a result of his wise decision his protégée, following his teacher’s guidance, escapes the moral degradation with a valuable lesson of taking a share of responsibility for one’s own actions.

The outcome of an educational arrangement is completely different for Michael and Nick. Michael is presented in the novel as a rival source of leadership in the community. His approach towards its proceedings differs from James’s idea because instead of following ‘blindly’ a set of simple rules, Michael believes that one should have an appropriate image of one’s self: “He was always engaged in performing what James had called the second best act: the act which goes with exploring one’s personality and estimating the consequences rather than austere following the rules” (*The Bell* 205).

Michael’s devotion to the idea of ‘self-knowledge’ is the reason why he is unable to recognize the consequences of his own actions. Michael Meade at the age of twenty-five was a young schoolmaster aware of his homosexual inclinations. He had two homosexual affairs while still at school, nevertheless decided to pursue another one, this time with an under-aged boy for whom he was responsible. Nick, the object of his affection, was once “a child of



considerable beauty”, “a centre of loves and hates among his fellows: a trouble-maker and something of a star” (*The Bell* 101). The schoolmaster and his pupil begin to meet together after class:

Michael was continually amazed at the intelligence and delicacy of the boy who throughout contrived to hold the initiative, while at the same time wringing from his status as Michael’s pupil and disciple all the sweetness which in this changed situation such a relationship could hold. (*The Bell* 104)

They talk about their ambitions, childhood, homes and disappointments. Importantly, Michael feels no guilt from his attempts to seduce the boy, “only a hard determination to hold to the beloved object” (*The Bell* 105).

The intimacy blooms between the two until a non-conformist evangelist comes to the school. His passionate preaching inspires Nick to visit the Headmaster and explain the situation in which he has been involved. In a comment full of self-denial and almost slanderous reproach Michael dismisses the charges claiming that “The boy had contrived to give the impression that much more had happened than had in fact happened, and also seemed to have hinted that it was Michael who had led him unwillingly into an adventure which he had not understood and from which he had throughout been anxious to escape” (*The Bell* 107). In Michael’s analysis of the situation we find an alarmingly large number of words that are deliberately evasive, mirroring his vulnerability to the workings of the delusion-producing Ego. His reaction to the boy’s testimony confirms Michael’s inability to create a truthful image of himself and reminds us of the shortcomings of the sophists. Ultimately, the incident in which Nick was involved scars him for life and permanently contributes to his subsequent depression and alcoholism.

Many years later, Michael engages in an inappropriate relationship with another boy, Toby. When the situation gets complicated the failed schoolmaster employs exactly the same strategy of denial, which shows that no moral lesson has been delivered since the affair with Nick. Again, Michael is not able to control his needs, to suppress Eros. The false assumption about his own progress results in a tragedy because Nick, who currently is also a member of the Imber community, witnesses Michael’s courtship and eventually commits suicide. The tragic end awaiting Nick, the victim of the irresponsible teacher, shows how Michael’s inappropriate behaviour in the form of uncontrolled erotic fascination and inability to follow rules ruins a young man’s life.

In Murdoch's portrayal of the relationship between Michael and Nick the role of Eros is especially important. The pathology of sophistic practices is mirrored in the depravity of the romantic lives of Murdoch's characters. The 'sophists', abusing the power of words, tend to control the will of their subjects. The inability of the subjects to oppose and detect the ideological scum turns them into puppets in the hands of an erudite master. To complete the picture of utter control wielded by the sophist characters, Murdoch supplies the mental enslavement with the depiction of sexual servitude. The relationship of this kind symbolizes unproductivity and stagnation of a non-dialogic arrangement, a direct contradiction to the Socratic method of communication.

In *The Unicorn* we learn that this asymmetric arrangement is connected with the concept of *Ate*, originating in ancient Greece:

Ate is the name of the almost automatic transfer of suffering from one being to another. Power is a form of Ate. The victims of power, and any power has its victims, are themselves infected. They have then to pass it on, to use power on others (...) it is in the Good that Ate is finally quenched, when it encounters a pure being who only suffers and does not attempt to pass the suffering on. (*The Bell* 98-99)

The victims of this enslaving power pass it over creating a chain of misery and simultaneously a hierarchy of erotic feudalism. Murdoch's portrayal of the relationship between Gerald Scottow and Jamesie Evercreech illustrates how the idea of sophistry understood as being guided by the bad Eros leads to moral degeneration, the complete opposite of the goals of dialectic.

The asymmetric nature of the relation between Gerald and Jamesie is emphasized in their characterization. According to Jamesie, Gerald Scottow, being a local, has fairy blood: "All the people round here are related to the fairies" (*The Unicorn* 44). His supernatural origin almost automatically predestines him, in Jamesie's view, to occupy the position of the master. Even though Jamesie occupies the position of the chauffeur at the Castle, when they ride together, Scottow is the one behind the wheel, perpetually controlling the situation. He is presented as the powerful one, who mounts the horse and "brushes the boy's cheek lightly with his whip" (*The Unicorn* 49). Jamesie, on the other hand, is "a pallid rather spoilt-looking cherub of about nineteen with a long head and a pointed chin" (*The Unicorn* 14) who displays a rather "dog-like appearance" (*The Unicorn* 14). He submissively follows his superior in a "sort of confiding submissive surrender" (*The Unicorn* 49).

It is mentioned that Gerald Scottow was previously in a relation of this sort with another man, Peter. We learn that in his previous affair Scottow was turned into Peter's subject: "Gerald was his man, his servant, his serf. He encouraged Hannah and everyone else, as I remember, to treat Gerald as a menial, even to kick him around a bit. And of course that was all part of the game" (*The Unicorn* 111). In accordance with the concept of Ate, Scottow is portrayed as passing the pattern which had once been imposed on him. Recreating his own 'initiation', Scottow gives Jamesie a tremendous whipping and eventually turns him into his slave.

The slavish relationship creates an environment preventing any real communication because ideas cannot pass freely. Opinions are formed forcibly and false assumptions are not corrected. Both 'partners' in this asymmetric relationship suffer from destructive fantasies about reality, therefore they readily embrace the role ascribed to them. The formulaic aspect of the arrangement evident in the roles of a master and a slave stands for the rigid frames of mind, unwilling to open for the knowledge and relying on the safe, old schemata.

The relationship between the master and the slave, between the sophist and his victim, is ensured by the ability to produce false images by both sides. The habit of creating images instead of facing reality can be a major obstacle in a proper communication, especially when education should take place. From Murdoch's novels we learn that in a dialogical exchange between an educator and a pupil the content of the conversation should not consist of these opinionated imaginings, of 'shadows', otherwise the goal of obtaining the knowledge is never to be reached. Neither teachers nor students are able to succeed when they do not contribute to the dialogue and are not willing to dispose of the false images.

Knowledge is a product of mutual engagement, it is produced in dialogue. The pupils rely on the master's guidance and expertise but it does not mean that the masters themselves are self-sufficient. In her portrayal of dialectical practices Murdoch puts an emphasis on the fact that dialogue involves the active contribution of both sides, at the same time appreciating the role of the pupil in the process. In *The Philosopher's Pupil* we find an interesting example of a pseudo-dialectician who is unable to answer philosophical questions because he denies the importance of the other in his metaphysical search.

John Robert Rozanov is carefully characterized as a philosopher who 'evolves', who is engaged in a constant search for answers. He goes through different stages mirrored by the change in his research interests. During his life Rozanov was a sceptic, a reductionist, a

“logical positivist of the most austere anti-metaphysical school”, he was interested in philosophy of science and even became interested in moral philosophy. He “became for a while an obsessive student of Plato and wrote a book called *Being and Beyond*, considered marvellous but eccentric, about Plato’s Theory of Ideas” (*The Philosopher’s Pupil* 83). It is said that he became a Neoplatonist who had even taken up religion.

Once long ago John Robert had believed in *that* which lies beyond. He had felt himself confronted by a thin film, something paper thin, through which, if he would, he could pass his hand; and which, in his precious philosophical faith and his precious philosophical patience, he did not yet presume to touch. Now he could see through it all as through some substance which had rotted away into scraggy fibres; and beyond was chaos, the uncategorized manifold, the ultimate jumble of the world, before which the metaphysician covers his eyes. Even some last lingering belief that someone, somewhere, at some time had had a pure unlying thought was, in *his* mind, a festering sore. (*The Philosopher’s Pupil* 133)

When Rozanov retires, he moves to Ennistone to continue his studies in peace. In order to practise philosophy he asks a local priest to accompany him and join in philosophical conversation. Rozanov explains his request claiming that he simply needs someone to talk to: “Someone entirely *serious*. I am accustomed to clarify my thoughts in the medium of conversation” (*The Philosopher’s Pupil* 162). When Father Bernard suggested that he might not understand something John Robert explained: “Oh *that* doesn’t matter. So long as you say what you think” (*The Philosopher’s Pupil* 162). For Rozanov Father Bernard was only “someone to hit the ball back” not a valuable partner in dialogue.

Father Bernard, who describes himself as “a shaman” rather than a priest (*The Philosopher’s Pupil* 156) was a man disillusioned with the teachings of the Church and ceased to believe in God. Even though he lost the faith in the authority of God and the whole mechanism of salvation the Catholic religion offers, he retained a deep faith in the most fundamental moral ideas. Compared with Rozanov, who looks at people with disdain, Father Bernard understands the importance of love in interpersonal relations and the significance of other people and things: “When we love people - and things - and our work and - we somehow get the *assurance* that good is there – it’s absolutely pure and absolutely *there* – it’s in the fabric - it *must* be” (*The Philosopher’s Pupil* 191). According to Father Bernard we all want to be loved. His conviction echoes one of Platonic concepts assuming that all people are good. In other words, evil is just the lack of knowledge of good. Rozanov, on the other hand, expresses a completely opposite view claiming that the situation is reversed and that the good

is always tempted by the evil: "The holy must try to know the demonic, must at some point frame the riddle and thirst for the answer, and that longing is the perfect contradiction of love of God" (*The Philosopher's Pupil* 197).

On account of his ideas and his lack of approval for the interlocutor as a valuable partner for a discussion, Rozanov, rather than a good dialectician, resembles a sophist. Bernard, who initially "had enjoyed playing the young man to John Robert's Socrates" (*The Philosopher's Pupil* 227) quickly realizes that the man may have a bad influence on his spirituality: "Rozanov was there *inside his mind*, like a virus, something that could not be cured. He had a new disease. Rozanovism" (*The Philosopher's Pupil* 230).

The bad influence Bernard senses becomes evident in the relation between Rozanov and his former pupil George. George McCaffrey is deeply affected by his teacher. He 'falls in love' with Rozanov, with philosophy and with Rozanov's philosophy in particular: "His soul was so shaken that he never told his love; and although he spoke admiringly of Rozanov when he went home he never revealed how absolutely this man had taken possession of his soul" (*The Philosopher's Pupil* 82). The admiration and affection, however, is one sided because the person whom George so absolutely cherishes is determined to banish the annoying student from his life: "Some pupil-teacher relationships last a lifetime. George maintained his side of the relationship, though it is doubtful whether Rozanov animated his" (*The Philosopher's Pupil* 84). Rozanov not only refuses to acknowledge George as his follower, but also advises him to give up philosophy, a suggestion which George cannot accept. George, who imagines himself to be a favourite pupil, "the beloved disciple" (*The Philosopher's Pupil* 138), is mortally wounded by this rejection: "Can't you even look at me, can't you concentrate on me for a moment? Please let me see you, let me be with you, it doesn't matter what we talk about" (*The Philosopher's Pupil* 138). Despite the zealous appeal of his former student, Rozanov excuses his lack of cooperation claiming that "There isn't any structure here for communication" (*The Philosopher's Pupil* 225). George's reply, however, introduces a structure for communication, the structure which echoes Murdoch's directives for dialectic. He claims that "There is a structure! How can you deny it? There *is*! We are human beings. You taught me philosophy and I love you" (*The Philosopher's Pupil* 225).

One may suppose that because of Rozanov's aloofness and his deliberate isolation George gradually sinks into a toxic nihilism. George, as the character of a rejected pupil, figures as an example of a human being deprived of the sun, the knowledge. The corrupting

aspect of this arrangement is evident in his behaviour. He is violent: “A madman in a cupboard” (*The Philosopher’s Pupil* 182). At the opening of the book he even tries to kill his own wife. Because of his unrequited feeling towards the person whom he has considered his master and his guru, his mental state deteriorates: “Pride and vanity and venomous hurt feelings obscured his sun. He saw the world as a conspiracy against him, and himself as a victim of cosmic injustice” (*The Philosopher’s Pupil* 82). Eventually George realizes that he worshipped a false sun, devoted his time to a sophist rather than a dialectician, and the illuminative realization is presented in a picturesque scene when after an unsuccessful attempt to kill his teacher, George gets blind.

Rozanov, being a great philosopher, an excellent and acclaimed scholar, is not capable of even a single gesture of goodness or pity towards the man who has followed him all his life. Their relationship illustrates how the lack of respect for another human being and essentially the lack of love and goodness negatively affect communication. Once again, Murdoch emphasizes the presence of Eros, taking the form of healthy interest in another human being as a stimulus that helps interlocutors to achieve enlightenment.

Goodness and good located by Plato and consequently by Murdoch at the top of metaphysical hierarchy, like a magnet attracts the searchers of truth, the practitioners of dialectics, in its own direction. The application of the dialectical method proves the validity of this metaphysical vision. Guided discussion, devoid of partial ideological opinions, leads all open-minded practitioners to the conclusions supporting Plato’s claims. Plato believed that theoretically anyone may aspire to understand the system offered by the philosopher, and confirm its irrefutable quality, even individuals who in their worldview display the most striking denial of the supremacy of goodness.

In *Gorgias* Plato introduces the character of Callicles, a gifted speaker and an alternative for the Socratic moral position. Compared with the threat the sophists posed, Callicles was probably more of a fictional invention and Plato put him in the position of playing the living embodiment of the utterly unmoral stance.<sup>52</sup> In the process of *elenchus*, of testing his interlocutor’s axioms and dogmas, Socrates clashes with Callicles and exposes his

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<sup>52</sup> Walter Hamilton in his introduction to *Gorgias* argues convincingly that a question whether Callicles is an imaginary character or not must remain open. See Plato. *Gorgias*. Transl. Hamilton, Walter. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1960), p.11.

weakness. Callicles is unable to give an account of good and bad, right and wrong, that is consistent with his own life and his own convictions. Internal disharmony is revealed when Socrates exposes the fact that the link between the man and his thesis is incoherent. Socrates forces Callicles to admit that wrong-doing and not being punished for wrong-doing are the worst of all evils and argues that his denial of this simple truth would lead to disharmony: “Callicles will never be at peace with himself; he will remain at variance with himself all his long life” (*Gorgias* 76). Moreover, Socrates supplies his accusation with the example of his own behaviour. Socrates, who in Plato’s representation lives in accordance with his ideas, claims that “It would be better for me to have a musical instrument or a chorus which I was directing in discord and out of tune, better that the mass of mankind should disagree with me and contradict me than that I, a single individual, should be out of harmony with myself and contradict myself” (*Gorgias* 76).

During the detailed questioning Socrates proves that the natural good instincts of Callicles are shadowed by a dangerous yet convenient ideology he had mistakenly chosen. In accordance with Plato’s idea that all human beings are good, Socrates proves that the ideas held by Callicles stem from his ignorance and stubborn denial of the natural order which coincides with Plato’s metaphysics. In Plato’s portrayal Callicles, the embodiment of evil, the figure whose ideas we can nowadays classify as utterly Nietzschean, is simply a man out of touch with himself, not able to see himself correctly and acknowledge his natural yearning for good.

The results of refutation are essentially negative and reveal the incoherence between the life and the doctrine of the interlocutor. In the portrayal of Socrates’s archenemy an important role is assigned to shame. The feeling of shame experienced by Callicles is the harbinger of his rising awareness and recognition of disharmony. The shame serves as a natural reminder of the good-centred system. Kahn observes: “Shame reflects a Platonic conception corresponding to our own notion of an innate moral sense, but which Plato describes as a universal desire for what is good [...]” (138).

Socrates implies that we all have a deep and fully rational desire for justice and virtue. This is our true will because what is good for us consists in the just and virtuous condition of the soul. But if we lack the knowledge or *technē* of justice and virtue, we are unable to identify the object of our own rational desire. In Plato’s portrayal of Callicles, the evil character is evil

only because he is ignorant of the good, and lives his life in denial. The feeling of shame, according to Kahn, helps Callicles to reconcile with his good nature:

When shame at admitting base, unmanly or politically disastrous pleasures into his moral scheme leads Callicles to recognize the incoherence of a life devoted both to political power and to the indiscriminate gratification, he is obliged, in effect, to abandon the pursuit of *epithumia*, “appetite” or pleasure at any price, for the Socratic principle of *boulesthai*: the evaluation of impulse and gratification according to some standard of what is good. (141)

In Plato’s dialogues the characters like Callicles, the embodiments of evil, present the contrast enhancing the importance of good. In Murdoch’s novels the contrast between good and evil is also preserved, but like in the Platonic account it is not merely a dualistic juxtaposition. In place of a rigid dualism Murdoch offers a model where at the centre, or at the top, is located the virtue of good and she describes her characters in reference to the centre. Those who in accordance with their instincts are aware of the supremacy of good, of its magnetic power, like Stuart or Tallis, function as its spokesmen in the dialogical passages. A great many of characters in Murdoch’s novels, maybe even the majority of them, are located far away from the centre, on the outskirts of this ‘good-centric’ model, and are portrayed at a crucial point of developing an awareness of their own ignorance and discovering an internal disharmony in their reasoning.

Plato claims that evil is just the ignorance of good. Therefore in Murdoch’s fiction the characters that may come across as evil or demonic are not purely and exclusively malicious. Instead, Murdoch’s characters should rather be assessed as being in a state of ‘motion’ always heading towards the good or receding from it. The function of *elenchus* and consequently of dialectic is to bring the natural desire for good to the consciousness of interlocutors, even those overtly ignoring its existence. The role ascribed to shame in Murdoch’s depiction of dialectical practices appears to be similar to the function of shame in Plato’s dialogues.

In Murdoch’s fiction we find examples of ‘villains’ who, confronted with the figures of good, recognize their own shortcomings stemming from painful and shameful experiences. Take for instance the character of Julius in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*.

Julius puts into trial beliefs of other characters appearing in the novel, a process which reminds us of the standard procedure of the Socratic *elenchus*. He brings about chaos in the peaceful lives of a group of friends, peaceful but full of hypocrisy. His interventions are often classified as malicious, and Julius as a character in general tends to be received as a purely



negative force in the novel. Jędrzejkiewicz describes Julius as a figure of Satan and a personification of evil. Set against Tallis, a personification of good and the figure of Christ, Julius tries to prove that all people belong to his kingdom and, in fact, he is among 'his own kind'. He claims that most people differ from him, because they yield to their illusions and hypocrisy. Moreover, they are less inventive and efficient in performing evil deeds (*Perspektywa etyczna* 131).<sup>53</sup>

Jędrzejkiewicz is right in capturing the contrast between Tallis and Julius, but in her analysis she marginalizes the importance of the fact that Murdoch presents also more human side to Julius, the side which Tallis, like Socrates, is able to highlight in their conversations. When Tallis accidentally cuts himself, Julius helps to put a plaster on his wound. Moreover, in a conversation with Tallis, it is revealed that Julius King, previously Kahn, was a prisoner at the death camp in Belsen. Being a victim of Nazi doctors, he himself returns as an unscrupulous scientist, a demonic experimenter with the morality of human kind, as perceived by other characters. The proximity of goodness forces him to reveal the shameful and painful past that cast him in the role of a continuator of the evil practices he had experienced. Yet even Julius, a morally crooked man, a ruthless cynic, is capable of good gestures in the proximity of a wise dialectician. Once again Murdoch evokes the ancient concept of *Ate*, the cyclic repetition of corrupting schemata, persisting until not confronted with the good. When Julius approaches Tallis, his own good qualities are revealed and his negative appeal is annihilated. In the presence of Tallis he may act in a natural way, in accordance with himself. He is seen and sees things accurately. During the conversation they have, Tallis notices that Julius has a mark, a blue tattoo mark, a number inscribed in a circle, because in accordance with the qualities ascribed to dialecticians, Tallis is the only one capable of seeing Julius's 'scar' as both physical, in the form of camp tattoo, and mental, in the form of ideological disharmony. As Julius observes, maybe the reason that no one apart from Tallis has noticed is that "it is only visible in certain lights" (*A Fairly Honourable Defeat* 421).

Instead of seeing them as evil incarnate, we should approach the characters like Julius with more understanding, bearing in mind the fact that both Plato and Murdoch struggle to

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<sup>53</sup> „Jest on figurą szatana i uosobieniem zła. Przeciwwstawiony Tallisowi – uosobieniu dobra i figurze Chrystusa, Julius próbuje udowodnić, że wszyscy ludzie w sposób naturalny należą do jego królestwa, że jest on wśród 'swoich', którzy różnią się od niego wyłącznie złudzeniami, hipokryzją, zakłamaniem oraz mniejszą inwencją i sprawnością w czynieniu zła” (*Perspektywa etyczna* 131).

illustrate the process of ‘converting’, rather than condemning, the lost souls. Ideas, dogmas and axioms, like a veil, may obscure the vision but the dialectical process, which serves the purpose of exposing their falsity, may change the worldview of the most ardent opponents of the good-centric system.

#### **II.4 The Pedagogic Aspect of Iris Murdoch’s ‘Dialectical’ Novels**

It has been established that Murdoch with outmost deliberation and caution arranges the interactions between her characters and ascribes great significance to the modes and forms of communication. In her narratives, the moment of breakthrough, synonymous with an alteration of a character’s worldview, is often preceded or accompanied by a stimulating conversation. Modelled on Plato’s ‘conversations with Socrates’, these productive exchanges of ideas usually lead to moral and spiritual improvement and differ considerably from superficial or conventional exchanges of information that scratch upon the surface of a true meaning of things.

By introducing the conversations evoking Plato’s dialectical practice Murdoch provides us with a particular type of commentary on the events constituting the plot and on the nature of an ideological conflict in her novels. Their composition, involving dialectical passages based on dialogue, invites an impartial comparison and analysis and releases the author from the burden of taking sides or being explicit in expressing her own judgement. Lavery and Groarke observe that “Dialogue is a form which allows freedom to explore philosophical questions without the obligation of being authoritative. As a genre, the dialogue allows an author some freedom to explore philosophical questions without being obliged to pronounce authoritatively on the issues it raises” (19).<sup>54</sup>

Murdoch’s use of dialogue which is deliberately inconclusive may constitute a form of an artistic prelude, an introduction for further discussion. Nikulin reminds us that Plato relies on

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<sup>54</sup> Theoretical literature devoted to dialogue is extensive. A particularly noteworthy example is Mikhail Bakhtin’s famous study *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990). Because this thesis focuses on the comparative analysis of Plato’s dialogues and Murdoch’s fiction, other theories discussing dialogue as a genre are not explored here for the fear of obscuring the argumentation. On the Socratic dialogue and Mikhail Bakhtin in Murdoch’s novels see Peter Conradi, *The Saint and the Artist* (London: HarperCollings Publishers, 2001), pp 95, 364, 378. For discussion of the polyvocal nature of Murdoch’s philosophy, and the polyphonic aspect of her fiction see Barbara Stevens Heusel, *Iris Murdoch’s Paradoxical Novels: Thirty Years of Critical Reception* (New York: Camden House, 2001), pp.12, 72, 131-4.

the form of dialogue because “[t]he lack of any clear conclusion might itself entice the reader to think through the problems that are raised in a dialogue as an invitation for further discussion” (10). Like a good dialectician Murdoch noticeably restrains from imposing on a reader direct judgments so often ascribed to third-person narrators. Instead, she locates the weight of her philosophical deliberations within the *loci* of dialogue and like Plato uses the form to activate the reader and to stimulate his/her critical judgment. Wolicka observes that in the context of symmetrical, direct conversation the constant exchange of roles between speaker and listener is something given. As a result the conversation becomes a co-participation in the semiotic event of co-creation and understanding of the sense. A contact between an absent speaker and a present recipient becomes possible only due to the fact that the role of the latter has in some way been designed by the author, as the role of 'a virtual partner' in dialogue. A work's dramatic form and various maieutic, pedagogical, paideutic and mystagogic tricks make it easy for the reader to effectively find in the course of reading his/her role of 'an involved witness' (Wolicka 95).<sup>55</sup>

Echoing Plato's game with the readers initiated by dialogue, Murdoch remains very Platonic in her zealousness to initiate, by means of similarly thought-provoking forms, readerly reflection. The form of dialogue, used as a tool to re-evaluate and comment upon certain ideas, seems to be a perfect instrument because in its very own sense it is particularly engaging. Wolicka claims that written expression can fulfil the task of stimulating thoughts and memory of the reader but it must contain certain features shared with live speech. These features are present in Plato's dialogue, whose form is as close as it is possible for literature to direct conversation it imitates. Wolicka states that a dialogue intensifies above all the pragmatic functions of language. An exchange of ideas, presented in a series of questions and answers, the argumentation of Socrates, directed not only towards the clearly formulated questions and opposing the views of his interlocutors but also predicting possible difficulties and objections of 'the potential recipient', the entire construction of a rhetorical expression, especially of monologues, informative and introducing Plato's *porte parole*, clearly indicate

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<sup>55</sup> „W symetrycznym kontekście bezpośredniej, żywej rozmowy zakłada się między mówiącym a słuchaczem stale aktualną wymienną ról, dzięki czemu rozmowa staje się współuczestnictwem obydwu w semiotycznym zdarzeniu współtworzenia i współrozumienia sensu. [...] Kontakt nieobecnego nadawcy z obecnym odbiorcą staje się możliwy tylko dzięki temu, że „rola” tego drugiego została w pewien sposób zaprojektowana przez autora, jako rola ‘wirtualnego partnera’ dialogu. Dramatyczna forma utworu oraz rozmaite chwyt maieutyczne, pedagogiczne, paideutyczne i mystagogiczne (...) ułatwiają skutecznie odnajdywanie się czytelnika w trakcie lektury w roli ‘zaangażowanego świadka’” (Wolicka 95).

that all of these hermeneutical strategies have been calculated to establish contact with a 'virtual reader' (Wolicka 94).<sup>56</sup>

In Murdoch's fiction knowledge is the final product of dialectical exchange, of constant curiosity, the result of asking questions and deriving answers from the right people. The process of learning is an individual activity taking place inside our consciousness where the asymmetric and non-reciprocal relationship with what is beautiful and good is established. But it is also a collective activity, because the intellectual progress must be stimulated and guided by the friendly, qualified consciousness of another human being, which provides an alternative for the illusions of the Ego.

Murdoch's use of dialogue mirrors her statements about the art which provokes and enlivens thinking, not only mesmerizes and captivates. Art being the reproduction of the beautiful belongs to *becoming*, in other words to the metaphysical world. Consequently, it can lead us in this direction and provoke speculations that may turn into some real knowledge. Spontaneous and alive, a beautiful being escapes fixation in images and words. The form of dialogue, which is an artful imitation of spontaneous Socratic discourse, can bring us closer to this realm: "Dialogue imitates the art of dialectic. Yet on the other hand, written Platonic dialogue itself imitates oral and spontaneous live dialogue, in which dialectical procedures are always already present and effectively used" (Nikulin 16).

The effect of reaching knowledge by participating in dialectics is enhanced in Murdoch's novels by preserving the classical structure based on the juxtaposition of opposites. In Murdoch's fiction the characters appearing in the dialogues are often presented as the ideological opposites. This structure reminds us of the composition of Plato's dialogues. Nikulin claims that:

Both Platonic dialogue and dialectic proceed in terms of opposites. Moving in and through opposites constantly opens up the possibility for contradiction, refutation (which is why Socratic dialogue is "elenchic", or refutational), opposition and disagreement. Because Platonic dialogue presupposes disagreement in that interlocutors test

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<sup>56</sup> „Dialog aktualizuje i intensyfikuje przede wszystkim pragmatyczne funkcje języka. Wymiana myśli, prezentowana w serii pytań i odpowiedzi, argumentacja Sokratesa, skierowana nie tylko ku wyraźnie sformułowanym przez jego partnerów kwestiom i przeciwstawnym poglądom, ale również jak gdyby przewidująca możliwe trudności i zastrzeżenia 'potencjalnego odbiorcy', cała konstrukcja retoryczna wypowiedzi, zwłaszcza monologów pouczających i wtajemniczających Platonowego *porte parole*, dobitnie wskazują, że całość tych zabiegów hermeneutycznych została obliczona na nawiązanie kontaktu z 'wirtualnym czytelnikiem'" (Wolicka 94).

and try to refute the other's opinion, such dialogue is inevitably *agonistic*, based on struggle and competition. The purpose of *agōn* is to win a dialectical competition by revealing a weakness and inconsistency in the other's claim by gaining the upper hand in the discussion, and by trying to persuade the other of the superiority of one's own argument. (6)

The process of interpretation of Murdoch's texts, which essentially is a confrontation with the alien consciousness encapsulated in a literary form, resembles the dialectical process to a great extent. The meaning is the product of a reader's effort to follow the guidelines left by the author, who towers over the text yet abstains from passing indoctrinating judgements. A reader forcing his/her way out of the form struggles to get an insight into the metaphysical world, the vision gained as a prize for the pursuit of wisdom.

The presence of dialogue, remodelled by Murdoch for the purposes of her fiction, gives her prose a distinctively and profoundly educational character. The personal voice of the author remains deeply hidden. Like an object of a philosophical quest for knowledge, the author's message awaits to be discovered by means of rational inquiry. Murdoch's strategy seems to be very similar to the one adopted by Plato, whose principal aim, particularly in the earlier works, is not to assert true propositions but to alter the minds and hearts of his readers.

Murdoch's creative attempts to introduce dialogue into her novels locate her among other transcendentalist writers like Lessing, Golding, Spark or Fowles. Shiva Rahbaran observes that these writers were not disenchanted with the form of the novel "but invigorated their quest for new forms of the novel as *tools* for coming as close as possible to the truth of life" (69). The post-war society detached from all the systems of belief that once offered us stability, unity, order and security is a society at a loss to find ideals and teachers. Among the teachers that restrain from indoctrination, promote objectivity but at the same time are capable of offering an alternative for the prevailing cynicism remains the good, old-fashioned novel constituting metaphysics *per se*. In the absence of any convincing religious or philosophical ideas and until a better proposal is made novels remain the sources of post-war ethics applicable in real life. For centuries, literature, despite its shortcomings has been the principal purveyor of sophisticated reflection on the nature of our existence, supplying rich and valuable content:

The Ancients used parables, simple stories to convey their ideas, oral literature ('orature') to transmit their wisdom, their knowledge of virtue, of the road to morals [...] Then literature *was* philosophy and philosophy literature, and all great dramatists, from Sophocles to Shakespeare, were philosophers. Likewise, in the modern world, only

novelists who are *good* men and women can play a role of ethical metaphysicians, that is, indicate the pathway to goodness and compassion. (Ikonomakis 322)

Murdoch, a well-educated philosopher luckily endowed with a set of artistic skills, somewhat like Plato's enlightened prisoner returns to the cave to disclose to the world her wisdom. She uses the form with which the prisoner is familiar, the shiny, mesmerizing objects of art which appeal to the Ego, but she shrewdly smuggles in educational content stimulating the dormant curiosity of the fellow prisoners. In her endeavours to achieve this goal she relocates the philosophical debate from the academic salons to the living rooms of regular folks. The needs and deeds of her protagonists, their dilemmas and love lives, the content with which an average reader feels comfortable and at ease, constitute an elaborate excuse to invite a more sophisticated philosophical and ethical inquiry and at the same time illustrate the practical applicability of Murdoch's moral philosophy.

A great spokesman for art's potential to alter minds and souls, Murdoch definitely learned Plato's lesson to care for the form, but at the same time surpassed the scepticism of her master and put a greater trust in the content. She encourages us to persevere in our critical endeavours despite the inescapable flaws of the written text. The important thing, in the spirit of Murdoch's conception of her art, is to deconstruct this faulty object, giving it "a trained purified attention without falsifying it in the process", in order to extricate from it something valuable, "a perceived truth" ("The Fire and the Sun" 459). The artist may be a great informant, at least a gossip, but at the same time, through some deeper vision, may indeed become a privileged truth-teller. In Murdoch's view, a good artist, like a dialectician, "may artfully confuse us" yet "on the whole he instructs us" for art is "far and away the most educational thing we have, far more so than its rivals, philosophy and theology and science" ("Fire and the Sun" 461). Thus, she uses her philosophical insight to teach us something about the nature of our reality and about ourselves, relying on the form of the novel. By playing with genres, narrative voices, focalization and characterization, she employs all the tricks of the trade to bring us into the aporetic confusion, which will hopefully lead us towards good.

# **Chapter III**

## **The Role of Cultural Heritage in Plato's Dialogues and Iris Murdoch's Fiction**

The previous chapter was devoted to the portrayal of characters who display a certain mastery of words. It was argued that sophist-like characters are paired with exemplary teachers to echo the narrative situations in Plato's dialogues. It was established that the distrust towards oratory and sophistry which pervades the arguments of Socrates is also palpable in Murdoch's fiction.

The following chapter describes the influence of cultural heritage on the outlook of Murdoch's characters. It discusses how non-physical aspects of culture, like social values, traditions, and the means of artistic expression used to preserve them, affect the characters' actions. Particular attention will be given to the role of philosophical and literary texts in shaping the characters' outlooks. Murdoch's depiction of their responses to various texts will be scrutinized and it will be argued that the author establishes a meaningful connection between characters' actions and the texts they find inspiring. I will discuss the narrative strategy of intertextuality used by Murdoch to render that connection. The use of various genres and literary allusions will be argued to echo Plato's ideas. I will contend that Murdoch's choice of genres mirrors the state of *eikasia* which Plato describes in The Allegory of the Cave. Furthermore, Plato's treatment of poetry as an activity inviting emulation will be traced in Murdoch's description of the process of reading. Finally, the chapter gives insight into Murdoch's evaluation of the literary canon and locates her ideas concerning the influence of various texts in the field of contemporary cognitive studies.

### **III.1 Poets and rhapsodes as the preservers of cultural heritage and the sources of influence in Plato's dialogues**

Plato's attitude towards poets and rhapsodes has been widely discussed over the years by many scholars. Some of the most recent and honourable mentions include Susan B. Levin (2001) who explores the relationship of literature and philosophy trying to explain the reasons of the ancient quarrel, Julius A. Elias (1984) who in his study of Plato's dialogues discusses

Plato's defence of poets, or Kevin M. Crotty (2009) who offers insight into the influence of poetry on Plato's own writing style. Each of these scholars manages to introduce something new and relevant to the discussion, yet the names evoked constitute only a small percentage of the scholarly research pertaining to Plato's treatment of poets. Due to the fact that the topic has not ceased to provoke an extensive and ongoing discussion, for the purpose of this chapter I have decided to focus on only one aspect of this debate, namely on Plato's concerns related to the impact of poets on moral education. Therefore, the scope of my research in this chapter is limited to Plato's treatment of poetry as a tool for codifying and popularizing the ideas mistakenly taken for facts, which consequently, according to the philosopher, can affect negatively the moral life of the individual.

To discuss this aspect I will start by analysing how Socrates is depicted by Plato in his dialogues, interacting with poets, or rather with the cultural heritage that the poets helped to shape. In Plato's dialogues Socrates is depicted as a character who is knowledgeable about different types of literary works circulating within his community. The number of poets mentioned in the philosophical discussions he initiates is remarkable. Among widely acclaimed names we may distinguish for instance Theognis ("Meno" 229), Hesiod ("Symposium" 266), Pindar (*Gorgias* 79) and Euripides (*Gorgias* 80). It is worth mentioning that Socrates is not the only one who quotes lines from popular texts. His interlocutors like Protagoras, a highly educated sophist, or Glaucon, an influential Athenian, are also depicted as being well-educated in verses. The majority of the characters appearing in Plato's dialogues seem to be capable of reciting substantial fragments of popular works and interpreting their meaning. The pervading presence of poetry in the philosophical debates described by Plato allows us to conclude that the names and the lines quoted in the dialogues constituted a part of the cultural background shared by all of the characters.

The aspect of Socrates's characterization which emphasizes his knowledge of verses may denote that poetry was considered in Plato's times to be a source of knowledge, a source important enough to be examined during dialectical practice. Being knowledgeable about poetry seems to be presented in Plato's dialogues as synonymous with good education. Education, understood as familiarity with verses, is, for instance, the subject of Plato's dialogue entitled *Protagoras*. Protagoras, a famous sophist, claims that "the greatest mark of education in a man is his skill at discussing verses; that is to say, his ability to discriminate what is sound and what is unsound in a poet's writings" ("Protagoras" 185). For Protagoras the process of interpreting verses seems to be an equivalent of learning about the world. The



ability to spot in the poem the pieces of information that are truly applicable to real life is similar to obtaining wisdom. This status of poetry as the chief provider of guidance to the turbulent reality of life is challenged by Socrates, who, in the same dialogue, states that the practice of quoting lines is, in fact, a counterproductive process. According to Socrates, every time a philosophical discussion is reduced to an exchange of quotations, the quality of conversation drops:

Intellectual discourse on poetry, it seems to me, is very like the drinking parties of common unsophisticated types who, because of their inability to provide their own voices or their own conversation while they drink, such is their lack of education, bid up the price of flute-girls, and pay large fees to hire the extraneous voice of the flute and so accompany their evening with its voice to compensate for their own lack of conversation. But when the companions are well-bred and educated you won't find flute-girls, dancing girls or female acrobats: they are capable of entertaining themselves by the use of their own voices without silly fun and games of that sort, taking their turns at speaking and listening in good order even after they have drunk deeply. [...] We should set aside the poets and hold discourse directly with one another, putting ourselves to the test of truth. ("Protagoras" 196)

In the fragment above Socrates compares poets to distracting entertainers, and those who rely on their ready-made opinions to pretentious feasters. The comparison implies that according to him, poetry should not serve as an intermediary in the process of learning about the surrounding world. Moreover, reliance on poetry, on somebody else's thoughts and ideas, is viewed by him as a sign of intellectual lassitude. As a result of this attitude towards poets, in many of Plato's dialogues Socrates appears to use his good knowledge of verses to question the validity of ideas channelled by poetry and of its privileged status as a medium for granting access to knowledge.

In Plato's dialogues the ideas and concepts expressed in verses undergo a careful perusal. In *Euthyphro*, Socrates tests his interlocutor's understanding of piety, which is presented as influenced by poetry. Euthyphro, the eponymous theologian, is initially certain that his understanding of piety is correct, because in formulating his judgements and opinions he has relied on the authority of a great poet, Stasinus.<sup>57</sup> Euthyphro's certainty crumbles when Socrates dialectically challenges his assumptions. Socrates provokes him to reflect on the

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<sup>57</sup> Stasinus was a semi-legendary early Greek poet who supposedly wrote *Cypria*, one of the poems belonging to the Epic Cycle that narrate the War of Troy.

origin of his ideas by asking the following question: “Do you believe there is really war among the gods, and terrible enmities, and battles, and other things of that sort our poets tell, [...] Are we, Euthyphro, to say those things are so?” (*Euthyphro* 54). An important part of the process of questioning initiated by Socrates is the analysis of the message encoded in the poem by Stasinus, which Euthyphro found so relevant. The question asked by Socrates, and the exchange of opinions that follows, signals scepticism towards poetry on the part of Socrates. Eventually, the picture of the world in the poem by Stasinus is rejected on account of its inaccuracy (“Euthyphro” 62).

A similar examination of concepts preserved in poetry can be found in *Meno*. As in the previous case, Socrates resorts to dialectical questioning to check their validity, but this time he does so in order to revisit Meno’s understanding of the idea of virtue. As in Euthyphro’s case, Meno’s answers suggest that his knowledge about virtue is derived from poetry. In a desperate attempt to answer the questions asked by Socrates, Meno quotes fragments of elegiac verses by Theognis: “Virtue, as I take it, when he, who desires the honourable, is able to provide it for himself; so the poet says, and I say too – ‘Virtue is the desire of things honourable and the power of attaining them’” (*Meno* 225). Meno’s explanation comes in the form of quotation, not as the verbalization of his own thoughts. It seems to be a rather automatic and perfunctory reply, which is quickly dismissed by Socrates, who is looking for more insightful comments. The purpose of dialectical practice is to discover something new about the subject in question, therefore reliance on the popular authors is again seen as unproductive (*Meno* 249). After careful perusal of the ideas expressed in the poem by Theognis, Socrates manages to prove that the popular idea occupying Meno’s outlook is incongruent with reality. A careful deconstruction of his belief involving the analysis of verses is again used by Socrates to provoke revision of ideas facily derived from poetry and to induce some constructive criticism aimed at poets and their works.

As evident in *Meno*, while investigating the educational value of poetry, Socrates draws attention to verses which employ aphorisms. In another dialogue, entitled *Protagoras*, Socrates quotes the following fragment of a poem by Symonides: “It’s hard to be noble” (“Protagoras” 190). The sentence evoked by Socrates is used as an example of a saying which is derived from poetry and which sounds like an aphorism. Socrates explains that this kind of concise ‘truth’, or rather ‘semi-truth’, was privately circulating “among the wise men and was highly praised by them” (“Protagoras” 190). Pondering on the origins and the quotability of this kind of line, he observes that these laconic sayings originated in Sparta, where they were

traditionally treated as viable sources of knowledge: “Laconizing was a matter of the pursuit not of good physique but of wisdom, knowing that the ability to make this kind of saying is the mark of a truly educated man” (“Protagoras” 190). The philosopher explains that this “literary laconic terseness was the traditional style of philosophy” (“Protagoras” 190). We may conclude that aphorisms are viewed by Socrates as condensed forms of knowledge which are often incorporated in poetry and constitute its ideological nucleus. By exploring the origin of these aphorism-like ideas, Socrates establishes a contrast between two methods of obtaining knowledge, his own dialectical method versus traditional philosophy, based on concise, laconic truths, often mirrored in poetry. He invites a comparison of the truths expressed in poetry with the results of his dialectical practice, which subtly manifests the superiority of the latter.

Apart from their incorporation of unverified ideas, another reason behind Plato’s scepticism towards poets may stem from their similarity to orators. In yet another of Plato’s dialogues, *Gorgias*, it is suggested that the educational value of poetry is low because of its use of rhetoric. Poetry is said to be similar to “a sort of public speaking” (*Gorgias* 109, Murdoch’s emphasis). Socrates implies that poets, similarly to orators may try to “gratify their hearers, sacrificing the public interest to their own personal success, and treating their audience like children whom their only object is to please, without caring whether the effect of their speeches is improving or the reverse” (*Gorgias* 110). In *Gorgias* poets are accused of lack of responsibility and of not caring for the wellbeing of others. Being primarily concerned with entertaining the public and being focused on their own benefit, they cannot deliver truly educational content.

The scepticism towards the educational value of poetry which pervades Plato’s dialogues should be also linked to his concern for the origins of poets’ inspiration, expressed, amongst other places, in *Ion*. In this dialogue Socrates states that during the process of artistic creation poets enter in a state of divine ‘madness’:

For a poet is a light and winged and sacred thing, and is unable ever to indite until he has been inspired and put out of his senses, and his mind is no longer in him [...] For not by art do they utter these things, but by divine influence; since, if they had fully learnt by art to speak on one kind of theme, they would know how to speak on all. And for this reason God takes away the mind of these men and uses them as his ministers, just as he does soothsayers and godly seers. (*Ion* 534b-e)

From this description in *Ion* we learn that according to Socrates, the content of a poem is channelled through the poet who does not make any conscious effort to understand the message. The fragment shows that poets do not have conscious or rational access to the knowledge they popularize through their works. If they happen to capture the nature of things correctly, it is only due to the fact that they are truly inspired. Compared with philosophers, who, like Socrates, verify ideas through their reasoning, poets are granted a glimpse of truth, yet remain ignorant of its value. According to Socrates the same limited understanding is displayed by rhapsodists. In *Ion* Socrates ironically states:

I must say I have often envied you rhapsodes, Ion, for your art: for besides that it is fitting to your art that your person should be adorned and that you should look as handsome as possible, the necessity of being conversant with a number of good poets, and especially with Homer, the best and divinest poet of all, and of apprehending his thought and not merely learning off his words, is a matter for envy; since a man can never be a good rhapsode without understanding what the poet says. For the rhapsode ought to make himself an interpreter of the poet's thought to his audience; and to do this properly without knowing what the poet means is impossible. So one cannot but envy all this. (*Ion* 530b-c)

Socrates infers that Ion, who is highly praised and lauded for his good knowledge of Homer, does not in fact fully understand the message which he delivers. Rhapsodists who interpret and popularize given texts are viewed as ignorant of the content they distribute:

This is not an art in you, whereby you speak well on Homer, but a divine power, which moves you like that in the stone which Euripides named a magnet, but most people call "Heraclea stone." For this stone not only attracts iron rings, but also imparts to them a power whereby they in turn are able to do the very same thing as the stone, and attract other rings; so that sometimes there is formed quite a long chain of bits of iron and rings, suspended one from another; and they all depend for this power on that one stone. (*Ion* 533d-e).

Ion is viewed by Socrates as yet another link in the whole chain of distribution of ideas that require more careful verification. Similarly to poets, rhapsodes are treated by Socrates as intermediaries preventing the mind from approaching *episteme*, the knowledge of the world.<sup>58</sup>

Plato's attitude towards poets, here discussed in the light of his approach to moral education, should be viewed in a broader context. Therefore, relying on Walter Ong's interpretation of Plato's treatment of poets in "From Mimesis to Irony: The Distancing of Voice", I would like to emphasise that Plato's treatment of poets was deeply influenced by his

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<sup>58</sup> *Episteme* means knowledge. In Plato's terminology it stands for a justified true belief.

aspiration to reform the way his contemporaries thought by revisiting the most basic and natural source of influence in their lives, namely their cultural heritage. Ong suggests that Plato's main goal was to convince his contemporaries that they should liberate their thoughts from the shackles of formulaic thinking that the oral culture imposed. Ong's essay establishes that oral culture, which for centuries was the *locus communis*, was the source of influence of which Plato was particularly wary. It enshrined tradition, helped to preserve knowledge before the advent of writing, represented a revered heroic past, and provided some ontological safety within the community. It also helped to shape the unified vision of the world closely related to tribal identity. In this essay Ong explains that the function of epics such as Homer's *Iliad*, probably one of the highest achievements of oral culture, was not only to commemorate the deeds typical of the Hellenes, but also to introduce members of a given community into a shared perspective on the past and present. Participation in oral culture entailed the embracement of codified role models, archetypes and means of conduct. According to Ong, the heroes of the past alongside with the *topoi* preserved in the popular stories and poems of the time were treated by Plato as obstacles to intellectual development.

Due to the fact that poetry was viewed as a rival educational tool, Plato, in his reformatory zeal, wanted to separate his audience from it, along with the oral tradition from which it originated. Ong claims that the fictional Socrates was a character whose purpose was to destroy the mimetic order established by the oral culture. He suggests that Plato strove to detach his readers from the oral tradition and to activate their critical agency. He further contends that this objective was achieved by Plato by the use of various narrative techniques which cast a shadow of doubt on poetry and on the oral tradition in general (*Osoba – świadomość – komunikacja* 93).

A notable example of these strategies can be found for instance in *Phaedrus*, the dialogue in which Socrates discusses the nature of poetry and rhapsodic tradition. Two interlocutors, namely Socrates and Phaedrus, meet outside the town to conduct their philosophical inquiry. The setting seems to be carefully selected, because the idyllic scenery is further endowed with a special meaning. The place of their meeting is located outside the community, in other words, outside the domain of culture which the city represents and which is associated with the activity of poets. The location may signal the need for distance from the immediate sources of influence offered by the cultural domain of the city in order to be able to survey the problems objectively.

Another example of Plato's narrative strategy for distancing the reader from oral poetry may be also traced in *The Symposium*. Here, the choice of the narrative frame casts a shadow of doubt on the method of passing information orally. In this dialogue Plato sets the story in the past. We learn about the main event not from the participants, but from people who heard of it from others. By quoting and paraphrasing the testimonies of other people, the author mirrors the model of distribution characteristic of oral tradition, yet, because of the written form of the dialogue, the credibility of the people involved in passing on the message orally, including the narrator himself, is questioned. This narrative strategy, which employs the model of transferring information with which his public was familiar, and here adapted to a new medium, produces peculiar confusion in the reader.

This strategy contributes to the purposefully enigmatic nature of Plato's literary style. In his dialogues the distance between the object of knowledge and the reader seems to be further enhanced by the use of stylistic devices, introducing a second layer of interpretation through allegories, metaphors, and, most importantly, irony, for which Socrates became famous. Plato's dialogues seem to embrace and mirror the tensions between the old way of thinking, associated with oral culture, and a new one, associated with writing. Scholars testify to the particular nature of Plato's dialogues. Twyla Gibson emphasizes the hybridity of Plato's dialogues and claims that "Plato was a crucial fulcrum from the transition from oral to literate modes of communication in ancient Greek culture" (2). Marshall McLuhan goes even further and claims that the role of Plato's dialogues in the Literate Revolution is comparable to Gutenberg's impact on the development of literacy. Judging by the description of the shift from the oral to the written provided by Rosalind Thomas, the task of altering the conceptual framework of his contemporaries could be achieved by Plato by combining the predilection to oral communication with a literary form which offers innovative ways of provoking reflection. Thomas suggests that in spite of the emergence of writing as an alternative means of communication, speech remained considerably influential. She points out that Greek democracy depended on oratory and speeches. Rhetoric was one of the most important subjects an aspiring politician had to learn. Theatre, a popular form of entertainment, also depended on oral performance, and finally, cultural material and tradition were still transmitted orally from one generation to another. Thomas claims that: "Certainly, there was an extraordinarily sophisticated range of literary and intellectual activity in the classical centuries. Yet most Greek literature was meant to be heard of even sung - thus transmitted

orally - and there was a strong current of distaste for the written word even among the highly literate" (3).

The narrative strategies used by Plato in his dialogues engage the reader by inviting him to participate in ongoing debates, but at the same time induce in him a sense of inferiority in the face of the object of knowledge. Plato's writings seem to be pervaded by ambiguity and uncertainty and produce in the reader a feeling which may be compared to the state of *aporia*, the bafflement caused by the complexity of idea and the reader's realization of his ignorance. The structure of Plato's dialogues, strongly connected to oral practice by way of recreating circumstances of an actual conversation, is, nevertheless, subjected to the rules of dialectical practice. Dialectic invites dialogical exchange of information, a constant critique of ideas which rarely produces visible results. Furthermore, the presence of stylistic nuances like the settings in *Phaedrus* may serve the purpose of separating the reader from the oral tradition and provoking evaluation of the content. Contrary to a self-evident message handed over in the communication within the oral tradition, the message inscribed in Plato's texts is more elusive and requires more effort on the part of the receiving party. Dialogue as a medium, despite its strong connection to oral culture, eventually becomes appreciated through solitary study. That, ironically, results in distancing the reader from the primary source of influence, namely the communal culture, even further. The reader is taken out of the system providing the formulaic solutions and put into a situation when he has to rely on his own intellectual abilities to decipher the message inscribed in the text. It appears that as both a philosopher and also as a writer, Plato promotes the state of doubt as something positive and necessary for intellectual advancement. Moreover, his treatment of poets and poetry in his dialogues allows us to conclude that the questioning of the ideas which penetrate culture, the validity of which is often taken for granted, should be revisited.

I presume that similarly to Plato's dialogues, Murdoch's fiction is also orientated towards depicting the role of cultural heritage in shaping her characters' attitude towards reality. In the following section of my thesis, it will be argued that ideas derived from the cultural heritage function as intermediaries between the characters' consciousness and the surrounding world. Moreover, it will be illustrated that the need to detach from cultural products that impair our perception is also evident in Murdoch's novels, which echo Plato's philosophical ideas conveyed in the unique form of his dialogues.

### III.2 The influence of cultural heritage on the characters' outlook in Murdoch's novels

Before I proceed to describe the interactions of Murdoch's characters with their cultural heritage, my understanding of the term 'cultural heritage' must be explained. As is the case with many concepts used in the humanities, the concept of cultural heritage does not easily yield to the constraints of precise logical schemes. Moreover, to complicate things further, it must be observed that the term 'cultural heritage' evokes an even more elusive and hard to determine concept of 'culture'. Despite the difficulty of providing all-encompassing definitions, a certain frame is indispensable. Among many definitions that can be invoked, my own understanding was deeply influenced by the definition of culture suggested at the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies held in 1985 in Mexico City "[Culture is] the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, which encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs" (*UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, fifth preambular paragraph*). Apart from its being concise and clear, the unquestionable advantage of this definition is that it points towards a commonly accepted understanding of the concept and is not rooted in any particular theory of literature. It remains neutral and concise enough to be incorporated in this analysis.

Having established the definition of culture I proceed to define the second potentially problematic term used in this research, namely cultural heritage. The definition of cultural heritage introduced here, once again relies on the nomenclature coined by UNESCO, which states that by intangible cultural heritage we understand:

Practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills - as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated with that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals, recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage is transmitted from generation to generation and is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. (*Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, Article 2*)

As is evident from the definition provided above, the notion of cultural heritage is inherently connected with the idea of identity. It is commonly acknowledged that the ideas, practices and beliefs practised within a community, and often expressed through art, have the potential to influence the process of shaping an individual's outlook and the way he or she relates to others. In Murdoch's novels this correlation between cultural heritage and the shaping of the



mental attitude of an individual influences the way her characters interact. As a writer, Murdoch seems to mirror the cultural practices of her contemporaries to show how they affect human relationships. Her fiction appears to be pervaded by the questions of what ideas, or to be more specific, what books and texts, are the sources of influence in the second half of the twentieth century. What intellectual forces originating in culture have the potential to influence our actions and decisions? To answer the question Murdoch surveys her own cultural background and, in her unique way, she recreates the socio-intellectual atmosphere of the second half of the twentieth century, introducing quotations, literary allusions, books, authors and other media which had influenced the way the English cultural outlook was shaped at that period in time.<sup>59</sup> Hilda Spear argues that in Murdoch's novels "many of the settings [...] reflect backgrounds familiar to her, and the civil servants, university dons, Irish characters and many others belonged to the milieu of her own life" (1). As Spear observes, Murdoch's characters, so familiar to her, can be located within the frame of the English cultural circle. Like the author, they are beneficiaries of the English cultural heritage, which may possibly reveal the nuances of Murdoch's evaluation of her own cultural heritage and its role.

To explore the role of cultural heritage, Murdoch turns to a highly educated upper-middle class. Academics, civil servants, psychoanalysts, writers and many others are depicted as deeply immersed in culture. Murdoch attempts to capture how their moral and ethical upbringing, based on particular ideas derived from their cultural heritage, contributes to their outlook and the stance they take in philosophical discussions in which they are engaged. She is particularly interested in the process of incorporation of these ideas into characters' consciousness. Despite the fact that Murdoch's characters may seem completely immersed in their inner worlds, the social impact of their cultural education occupies an important place in the author's artistic deliberations.

An interaction with cultural heritage which results in a subsequent revaluation of the ideas derived from it is remarkably depicted in *The Philosopher's Pupil*. In this novel Tom McCaffrey, a young man of twenty, is learning how to critically assess the images and concepts circulating in his cultural inheritance. From the beginning Tom is characterized as an aesthetic type, a person extremely responsive to the visual world. His aesthetic inclination is connected to his aspiration to become a professional pop-singer. He often entertains people by

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<sup>59</sup> *The Red and Green* covers the events taking place during the Easter Rebellion.

giving small recitals. His voice is considered to be average, compared to the beautiful and moving voice of Emmanuel Scarlett-Taylor, another singer featuring in the novel. The voice, a natural and innate attribute of an individual, may be deployed by Murdoch to symbolize the ability to contribute to the discourse and is intricately linked to the characters' outlook and intellectual abilities. Emma, a young historian, is wary of labels and stereotypes, which is evident in his problematic relation to his Irish identity. Tom, on the other hand, easily and readily plays with the concepts and ideas provided by his cultural heritage. The difference in their attitudes is particularly noticeable when the two boys enter for the first time a house they are supposed to look after over the summer. The wariness and suspicion of Emma, who retreats to read a history book, contrasts with the playfulness of Tom, who almost immediately starts to try on the clothes he finds at his friends' house. Their response to this new environment and their treatment of the 'property' they are in charge of may be symptomatic of their relationship to various cultural products.

Tom's uncritical openness and acceptance of the ideas and conventions circulating in contemporary culture is mirrored in his creative process. In his attempt to write lyrics for his own pop song he incorporates the following imagery:

He, the hero, in love, but restraining his fierce possessive desire, the  
girl, shy, gentle, timid, (a virgin?) unable to decide [...] But in fact  
Tom did himself aspire to be a gentleman and believed he was one.  
[...] He imagined protected girls who snuggle down in virgin cots at  
night. He thought too about rather wicked wild girls, who had run  
away from home, but he did not associate them with his mother. (*The  
Philosopher's Pupil* 213-214)

This description gives us an idea of the kind of imagery Tom finds inspiring and appealing. He is familiar with themes deeply imbedded in popular culture, such as the romantic pursuit of a virginal girl. The images used in his song are simulacra echoing texts and cultural products, the origin of which is untraceable and which convey stereotypical ideas pertaining to amatory exploits. It is emphasised that this is the convention Tom finds entertaining. Being the author of lyrics and a singer, Tom reminds us of the poets and rhapsodes in Plato's dialogues and, as is the case with their treatment by Plato, Murdoch is interested in the matter of Tom's moral responsibility for the ideas he wants to disseminate through his song.

The author sends Tom, an uneducated artist, on a quest to find his 'true voice'. The search starts when John Robert Rozanov, a famous philosopher, asks Tom to marry his granddaughter Hattie Meynell. The thought, ridiculous at first, slowly starts to grow on the

young man, because he is tempted to re-enact the scenario envisioned in his pop song. Rozanov's description of the young lady, isolated and virginal, converges with the idealized image of the romantic affair envisioned in Tom's scribbling. The experience of uncritically embracing simulacra derived from culture is described in the following way: "Some uncanny magic was already at work. [...] He was no longer free, he was even perhaps no longer innocent: no longer happy" (*The Philosopher's Pupil* 282). Tom relates to Hattie by inscribing her in the scenario derived from his cultural heritage and mindlessly refabricating the familiar images: "He held no attraction except that of acting out a dream-like destiny. He felt now no 'romantic curiosity', no ardour for some challenging 'quest'. What he did feel as he swam along so privately, so wretched, inside the steamy roly-poly, was a kind of restless, nasty erotic adventurism" (*The Philosopher's Pupil* 291). Falsifying images present in Tom's consciousness turn Hattie into some dark fantasy: "an evil maid, a sort of magic doll, bringing ill fortune, a curse, blighting happiness and freedom" (*The Philosopher's Pupil* 371). The process of getting intoxicated with the vulgarity induced by these images intercepted from his cultural background is further described by the author as: "the blackening and poisoning of imagination which is one the worst, as well as one of the commonest, forms of human misery. His world had become uncanny, full of terrible crimes and ordeals, and punishments" (*The Philosopher's Pupil* 371) and along with it the idea of Hattie is shown to evolve in the following way:

The image of Hattie shimmered before him now [...] He saw her silver-white blond hair cunningly pinned up or descending in amazingly long plaits or as he had seen it at the sea spread out like silk over the back of her dress. [...] Dully and casually he had turned away, failing to *see* that the being confronting him was a princess. But she's a false princess, he thought. I am in a state of temporary insanity, I must be. They are demons, both of them, wonderful and beautiful and not quite real. Rozanov is a magician who took me to his palace and showed me a maiden. But she was something that he had made, invented out of magic stuff, so as to ensnare me. (*The Philosopher's Pupil* 476).

After being thus poisoned, Tom struggles to reevaluate the conventions of womanhood that have influenced him. His struggle to transcend those stereotypical representations is shrewdly linked by the author to Tom's parallel striving to separate himself from the more immediate source of influence, namely his local community. The city of Ennistone, which Tom comes from, is said to be the place where Christ has been dethroned and replaced with the cult of

water (*The Philosopher's Pupil* 32).<sup>60</sup> Being an Ennistonian by birth, Tom seems to be fascinated by the local belief that the waters of Ennistone have “an aphrodisiac effect” (*The Philosopher's Pupil* 33) or even some sort of magical qualities. This popular belief, although officially rejected, is depicted as tenaciously present in the worldview of the locals. Although on the surface the inhabitants of Ennistone are declared rationalists, the long-lasting presence of the belief proves that it has never ceased to affect their imagination.

Tom is portrayed as very much influenced by the ideas circulating in the Ennistonian community. He is depicted as a member of a community group actively engaged in staging of *The Triumph of Aphrodite*, a fictional play by a fictional author, Gideon Parke, and inspired by the ‘myth’ about the supposedly magical qualities of the local springs. Tom participates in the venture very willingly, which may indicate the level of his commitment to the communal vision. The enterprise of staging the play, a joint venture in which many eminent Ennistonians participate, may symbolize the influence of the vision or idea on the whole group of people.

The turning point for Tom takes place when the theatre group responsible for staging the play decides to visit Hattie's house. The carnivalesque night scene in front of Hattie's house depicts the actors as immersed in an ecstatic, almost Dionysian trance. The behaviour of the actors in the garden of Hattie's house as well as the whole atmosphere gleefully evoked by Murdoch may be considered as an exteriorized manifestation of the collective unconscious caused not only by immersion in some unified aesthetic vision provided by the theatrical enterprise, but also by their own local myths and beliefs. Tom's participation in this theatrical debauchery illustrates his subjection to the communal perspective and shows how his personal struggle to get rid of false images is here tightly linked to his need to detach from the community as the source of tradition and the provider of cultural models which are incongruent with reality.

Tom realizes that he must separate from a communal myth-making consciousness and clear his vision.<sup>61</sup> Tormented by his inability to discern between what is real and imaginary,

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<sup>60</sup> Murdoch's description of the city's topography mirrors the mind-set of its inhabitants, crippled by the adherence to the false belief. Water in Murdoch's fiction seems to symbolize the awareness and self-consciousness, the state of being free from deluding fantasies. In the city of Ennistone water is forcefully tamed by channels and pools, evoking the concept of civilization and culture, which may signify that the consciousness of the locals is also tamed by some artificial constructs.

<sup>61</sup> Various communities are often depicted in Murdoch's fiction as unified by certain outlook or values. The communities are preservers of non-factual knowledge, the ideas or “beliefs” that are influential. Examples of these communities can be found for instance in *The Bell*, *The Good Apprentice* or in *The Book and the Brotherhood*. In each case we can see that these communities, glued together by dogmas or myths, interact with naïve people, who contest the veracity of their beliefs. The religious commune of Imber Court, although internally suffering from ideological splits, constitutes an intellectual challenge for Dora. The worldview of the three women residing at Seegard and forming some sort of secular sect, brings about the

Tom descends to the cave, from which allegedly the magical waters spring, and attempts to confront the local myth by checking its veracity empirically. However, when Tom gets to the source, ‘the magic’ is turned off. To his surprise “there was no steamy grotto with a scalding fount” (*The Philosopher’s Pupil* 507). He discovers that the belief that unofficially constitutes the identity and world-picture of the community is just a story present in the communal tradition. The descent followed by the conscious evaluation of the myth helps Tom form his own opinion not only on the origin of certain ideas but also on their influence on the way we perceive the people around us. With this demystification comes a firm resolution not to look at Hattie through the prism of entrancing imagery. Tom manages to find his own voice by critically evaluating the role models derived from his cultural heritage which at the beginning he was mindlessly copying. Consequently, from being a person uncritically attached to the communal vision of the world, Tom changes into a character capable of thinking in an independent way.

Another novel which focuses on the characters’ attitude to their cultural heritage is *The Flight from the Enchanter*. Murdoch’s second novel revolves around three people of different cultural backgrounds. Rosa Keepe, an affluent English lady, is portrayed as being entangled in a complicated liaison with Jan and Stefan Lusiewicz, immigrant brothers from Poland. They meet at the factory where Rosa, driven by her leftist ideas, works to reconnect herself with ‘real people’. Her first impression of the brothers is rather unfavourable. She perceives them as “dejected and colourless, half-starved, half-drowned animals” (*The Flight from the Enchanter* 43). The condescending attitude in Rosa’s outlook prevails, mostly on account of their poor command of the English language. Soon after meeting the brothers Rosa sets on a mission to ‘save’ them, which in her understanding involves also teaching them English. Taking on the role of their protector and ‘educator’ is depicted as particularly empowering. Teaching Jan and Stefan English is described in the following way:

She felt like the princess whose strong faith releases the prince from an enchanted sleep, or from the transfigured form of a beast. As her pair of princes awoke into the English tongue and as they were able more and more to reveal themselves to her, she found in them a hundred-fold the intelligence, the humour and the joy at which she had at first only guessed. (*The Flight from the Enchanter* 51)

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changes in Edward’s attitude. And finally, the group of Oxford graduates, the ideological brotherhood of educated intellectuals, inspires Gulliver to rethink his stance in life.

Rosa enjoys playing the role of “an English Lady” with her “pair of young leopards” (*The Flight from the Enchanter* 46). She is secretly delighted by the fact that the brothers treat her “with an inarticulate deference resembling religious awe” (*The Flight from the Enchanter* 45). From her perspective: “They were like poor savages confronted with a beautiful white girl” (*The Flight from the Enchanter* 45).

The vocabulary she chooses and the imagery she evokes allow us to infer that Rosa’s perception of the brothers is greatly influenced by her English identity. Her fantasies betray fascination with England’s colonial past and may echo the national discourse of supremacy. In spite of being altruistic and helpful, Rosa seems to be misguided by her understanding of Englishness, automatically setting herself in the role of the men’s superior. Despite the leftist and liberal opinions Rosa officially proclaims, her unconscious belief in England’s cultural dominance is also evident in her attitude towards the mother of Jan and Stefan. Always silent and passive, the old woman observes the unfolding events quietly squeezed into a small corner of the room. Although passive and non-responsive, her presence provokes the following reaction from Rosa: “The old woman never ceased to inspire in her [Rosa] a kind of awe which nearly amounted in terror. She fell into paying her no more attention, for practical purposes, as if she had been another, quaint piece of furniture” (*The Flight from the Enchanter* 48). Rosa, possessive of her two *protégés*, refuses to acknowledge their biological mother as the source of authority in the brothers’ lives. She refuses to communicate with her, and objectifies her by shamelessly making love to Stefan and Jan right in front of her. Moreover, infected by Rosa’s ideological supremacy, the brothers become more and more violent towards their mother, going as far as to threaten that they will burn the old lady.

In this novel the passiveness and muteness of the mother is juxtaposed with Rosa’s proactive cultural incursion. The result of this encounter is the imposition onto Jan and Stefan of her belief that the English are predestined to elevate those who are culturally disadvantaged. The process of introducing them to her understanding of Englishness is illustrated by Murdoch via the settings. The brothers live in a small room in Pimlico, which they have furnished with a large bed-frame probably reclaimed from the dump. The bed-frame constitutes a central feature of the room. Their meetings, English lessons as well as occasional love-making, take place inside that very frame. The special role of the bed frame is pinpointed as follows: “Its presence was a joke of which they seemed never to get tired” (*The Flight from the Enchanter* 46). The shabby bed frame may symbolize the rigidity and a perplexing longevity of the socio-cultural constructs that the three of them choose to invoke in

their relationship, presumably serving Murdoch's purpose of convincing readers that certain ideas, although obviously anachronistic and ridiculous, may easily find their way back into our consciousness.

Murdoch explores the origins of the ideas which inspire Rosa's false sense of superiority and she invites the interpretation that Rosa's outlook on the English may be deeply influenced by the representations of her nation drawn by the most famous authors writing in English.<sup>62</sup> We are not told exactly which texts have influenced her, but hints can be found in another of Murdoch's novels that tackles the problem of Englishness, *The Book and the Brotherhood*. In this later novel the idea of Englishness is shown to be predominantly shaped by an idealized image of life in a traditional English Country House, a stronghold of morality. Take for instance the description of English Apples called Cox's Orange Pippins which occurs here: "These English apples, much cherished by Rose's forebears, had always seemed to Rose to be good apples, innocent apples, mythological apples, apples of virtue, full of the sweet nourishment of goodness" (*The Book and the Brotherhood* 241).

The phenomenon of relying on images derived from cultural heritage described by Murdoch in *The Flight from the Enchanter* and *The Book and the Brotherhood* illustrates a very common practice. Krishnan Kumar, the author of *The Making of English National Identity* emphasizes that England, which intermediates in Rosa's relationship with the two foreigners, evokes a lot of emotions and associations due to its representations found in art:

England is a highly emotive word. When intoned by, say, an Olivier (as in Henry V) or a Gielgud (as in Richard II), it can produce spine-tingling effects. It has served, in a way never attained by 'Britain' or any of the British derivatives, to focus ideas and ideals. It has been the subject of innumerable eulogies and apostrophes by poets and playwrights. From Shakespeare to Rupert Brooke it has been lauded as the font of freedom and the standard of civilization, a place of virtue as well as of beauty. (8)

Even though the process seems to be only natural, the extent to which Murdoch's characters identify with the culturally constructed idea of Englishness is surprising, chiefly because this somehow unacknowledged nationalism which pervades their fantasies often stands in a direct

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<sup>62</sup> The ethnic English, as the core nation of the British Isles, have been anatomized ceaselessly by many writers. Some notable examples of the texts that deal with English national identity are Ralph Waldo Emerson's *English Traits* (1856), Hippolyte Taine's *Notes on England* (1860–70) and Henry James's *English Hours* (1905). To these notable attempts at capturing a national portrait one could also add George Orwell's *The Lion and the Unicorn* (1941) and Jeremy Paxman's *The English: A Portrait of a People* (2000).

opposition to the political slogans they officially preach. In Rosa's portrayal Murdoch draws attention to the existence of certain hypocrisy. It becomes perceptible in the discrepancy between Rosa's ideals and her actual behaviour, which is far from socialistic egalitarianism. Interestingly, the instinctive superiority which Murdoch ascribes to Rosa is presumed to be a stereotypically English characteristic. In the 'Preface' to *The Oxford History of England* by A. J. P. Taylor English self-centrism and presumptuousness is discussed as an integral part of English national identity, which is imbedded in the mental framework of English people. Taylor states that "[w]hen the Oxford History of England was launched a generation ago, 'England' was still an all-embracing word. It meant indiscriminately England and Wales; Great Britain; the United Kingdom; and even the British Empire. Foreigners used it as the name of a Great Power and indeed continue to do so" (J.P Taylor v). Taylor's description testifies to the long-lasting and pervasive contention that other ethnic groups, existing within the political frames of which the English are part, are treated as minor and less relevant. England is the dominant force within the national discourse.

The analysis of Rosa's relationship with the Lusiewicz brothers allows us to infer that Murdoch's characters of English origin are purposefully juxtaposed with representatives of some ethnic or national minority whom they struggle to understand in their own distinctive way. In *The Good Apprentice*, Harry Cuno, the man of English origin, meets Thomas McCaskerville, the Scot. The English and the Irish are meaningfully juxtaposed in *Under the Net*, in which Jake Donaghue's adventures are accompanied by his Irish comrade, Peter O'Finney. The relationship of the English and Italians is a theme in *The Italian Girl*, whereas the interactions of the English and the Russians are presented in *The Time of the Angels* in the relationship between Muriel Fisher and the Peshkovs. These juxtapositions appear to be a recurrent feature of Murdoch's novels and they invite revaluation of the concept of Englishness in its current form.

Murdoch's depiction of characters who rely on a cultural construct of Englishness when confronted with the Other seems to be evocative of Freud's description of the influence of collective identity on the individual. In his short book entitled *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, Freud claims that the collective identity, thus the identity of a certain group (including national identity) is defined over and over against that which differs from it:

Each individual is a component part of numerous groups, he is bound by ties of identification in many directions, and he has built up his ego ideal upon the most various models. Each individual therefore has a



share in numerous groups' minds-those of his race, of his class, of his creed, of his nationality. (*Group Psychology* 61)

By sharing and uncritically embracing the ideas underlying the whole construct of national identity we become conditioned to respond to others in a mechanical way. The similarity between Murdoch's presentation of the problem and Freud's work should not be surprising when we take into consideration the fact that Murdoch was a zealous, though highly critical, reader of Freud.<sup>63</sup> It seems that in her novels Murdoch continues to ponder upon the concept discussed previously by Freud, and, similarly to him, she emphasizes that an individual mind, guided and influenced by the identification with a group, is bound by the internal logic of the culturally provided framework. Murdoch's fiction strongly suggests that the agent must be liberated from thoughtless participation in such received ideas arrangement through the process of judicious analysis of the cultural representations she incorporates in her novels.<sup>64</sup>

Murdoch's presentation of the relationships built by the characters of English origin shows that when the idea of Englishness is prominently present in characters' consciousness, it usually blocks their proper understanding of others. Perceived through the prism of 'national myths', people representing different ethnical or national minorities are usually not well conceptualized, not well imagined, disappear quickly or are overtly demonized.<sup>65</sup> In *The Book and Brotherhood*, the following comment on the role of Englishness appears:

You value yourselves because you're English. You live on books and conversation and mutual admiration and drink – you're all alcoholics – and sentimental ideas of virtue. You have no energy, you are lazy people. The real heroes of our time are those who are brave enough to let go of the old, dreamy, self-centered, self-satisfied morality, and the old imperialistic moral person, who was monarch of all he surveyed! (*The Book and the Brotherhood* 336)

This fragment suggests that the role played by Englishness in structuring one's identity is undeniable and palpable. The remark is made by David Crimond, a character of Scottish

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<sup>63</sup> Iris Murdoch owned a copy of Freud's *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*. The copy, inscribed with her name, was part of her Oxford Library and now is available at Penrhyn Road Archives.

<sup>64</sup> George Orwell is another author who reinterpreted and exploited the concept of Englishness. In his essays, especially, *The English People* and *The Lion and The Unicorn*, he claimed that certain superiority expressed towards foreigners is a distinct feature of so called English national character: "The insularity of the English, their refusal to take foreigners seriously, is a folly that has to be paid for very heavily from time to time. But it plays its part in the English mystique, and the intellectuals who have tried to break it down have generally done more harm than good. At bottom, it is the same quality in the English character that repels the tourist and keeps out the invader" (*The Lion and The Unicorn*).

<sup>65</sup> See Peter Ackroyd, *The Origins of English Imagination* (New York: Nan A. Talese, 2003). Ackroyd points out that the English are the nation of dreamers and argues that because the English are surrounded by water fantasies slide easily into their minds.

origin, a person from the 'outside' who mercilessly diagnoses the intellectual condition of his English friends. His comment suggests that the English are passive and self-satisfied. Additionally, they are accused of deluding themselves that they are morally supreme. The picture of English people drawn by Crimond in *The Book and the Brotherhood* converges with Murdoch's portrayal of English characters. Englishness, as presented in Murdoch's fiction, seems to be synonymous with a particular form of misguided Romanticism, a set of attitudes characterized by dreaminess, nostalgia, self-centrism and ultimately some form of detachment from reality.<sup>66</sup> However, Murdoch seems to suggest that the privileged position of the English national myth is the sign of being misguided and that those characters who show attachment to it may be easily swayed by any other ideas which are appealing to the Ego.

The ease with which these 'dreamy and romantic ideas' can be replaced may be observed in Rosa's metamorphosis. Living inside the conceptual bubble, oblivious and uncritical of her cultural heritage, Rosa is portrayed as particularly susceptible to ideas which, similarly to the cultural construct of Englishness, appeal to her imagination. With the acquisition of a new language, Jan and Stefan acquire also the ability to tell their own story and convey their own ideas. The brothers, initially treated as infantile, almost childish protégés, become independent, and capable of enchanting Rosa. They tell Rosa the stories about Poland, which always begin with the words: 'in our village'. The location of the mysterious village remains unknown, because they are unable to locate it on the map. Their narrative strategy of detaching Rosa from the factual world familiar to her, contributes to the atmosphere of mystery that the twins masterfully create. They feed Rosa with a cautionary tale about their schoolmistress. The woman came to 'their village' from a city and made the serious mistake of offending Jan and Stefan. The twins decided to take their revenge and humiliate her. Set on seducing her they courted her independently and forced her to choose one of them by designating two different meeting spots, either by an old oak tree or beside a well. As a result of their plotting the woman died in tragic circumstances (*The Flight from the Enchanter* 72). The story is depicted as appealing to Rosa, because it conjures up something "like a vision procured in a fairy-tale" (*The Flight from the Enchanter* 66). Additionally, the story told by the twins relies heavily on the Romantic tradition. The plot as well as atmosphere resembles

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<sup>66</sup> Interestingly, in case of Murdoch's fiction, we cannot talk about the unified British identity. To describe the identity of Murdoch's characters we should probably use the adjective 'British'. The use of the term is perfectly reasonable, yet the idea of Britishness, seems to be completely missing from the consciousness of Murdoch's characters. Scots are marginalized in the same way the immigrants from Poland or Russia are. In Murdoch's novels dominance of the English and their ideological hegemony is emphasized probably, because, according to the author, it had a privileged status within the national discourse, the status which Murdoch preserved and mirrored in her fiction.

amatory adventures known from ballads, the genre traditionally revolving around the theme of romantic passion and vengeance. Rosa, immersed in her fantasies, is shown to yield completely to the picture of the world produced by the twins, romantic, gloomy, irrational and scary. Although fascinating, the story in which the schoolmistress dies as a result of offending the twins, makes Rosa wary, or even scared of Jan and Stefan. The brothers, who initially were approached with condescension, now begin to figure in Rosa's imagination as demons whose presence is really threatening. Rosa becomes aware that she is trapped and completely overtaken by the Romantic fantasies spawned by the twins. She realizes that their roles have become reversed when the boundaries set by her are no longer observed by Jan and Stefan. Rosa is utterly shocked when one of the brothers decides to visit her at her own house: "It was the first time that one of the Lusiewicz brothers had dared to come uninvited to the house in Camden Hill Square" (*The Flight from the Enchanter* 150). The fact that the brothers initiated an affair with Rosa and sexually subjected her is less shocking to her than this intrusion.

The search for identity, which in the case of Murdoch's characters is often provoked by their contact with the Other and is achieved by recycling cultural models, should be placed in a historical context. Following the sociologist Donald MacRae, Peter Mandler, the author of *The English National Character*, emphasises that starting from the late 1950s (so roughly from the beginning of Murdoch's literary career), a new kind of attitude towards personality started to prevail. This change in attitude entailed certain "indifference to public and collective life" in favour of personal life (Mandler 223). The tension that Murdoch's characters experience, namely the tension between one's private life and one's life as a member of a group, whether a small community, a nation or society in general, may be perceived as the result of this shift. Murdoch sees that an important part of the process of individualization, of looking for one's own identity, is the retrieving of popular themes and models that are present in collective imagination, often channelled by cultural products, and incorporating them in accordance with one's personal needs. People begin to shape their own characters by selecting among models and experiences. According to Mandler this individualism is also "one of the most ancient stereotypes about the English" (223). The imperative to establish oneself as an intellectually mature individual, free from external influences, which must have governed Murdoch's contemporaries, is mirrored in the novelist's depiction of her characters' willingness to experiment with their own identities by playing with different concepts derived from their cultural heritage.

### III.3 Murdoch's use of intertextuality in depiction of human consciousness as the echo of Plato's description of *eikasia*

Murdoch's depiction of the cultural heritage and its influence on characters' outlook forces us to explore further her ideas pertaining to human nature and consciousness. The following subchapter will present the influential role of Plato's ideas in Murdoch's representation of human consciousness interacting with cultural products, especially his Allegory of the Cave, and will focus on the use of intertextuality in Murdoch's depiction of human consciousness. As I argued in chapter one, the majority of Murdoch's characters are involved in the process of intellectual maturation. This process, evoking Plato's pilgrimage from the state of *eikasia* to a new state of awareness, is often illustrated with reference to carefully selected literary works. The following subchapter focuses on texts selected by Murdoch to depict the changes taking place in her characters' consciousness during this process. It will be argued that the author carefully selects the genres and authors whose role in shaping a character's outlook she wants to reassess, and juxtaposes them with her Platonic model. Her thought-provoking selection will also be presented as indicating a certain evaluation of the English literary canon on Murdoch's part.

To understand the role played by various texts in shaping individual moral lives requires some elaboration of Murdoch's approach to human nature and of her understanding of the way our consciousness works. Therefore, a short summary of Murdoch's ideas touching upon the subject in question as expressed in her philosophical essays is indispensable at this point. Murdoch points out that instead of making an effort to properly comprehend the world outside, we prefer to immerse ourselves in the world of fantasy, taking an easy way out of our existential conundrum. In "The Sovereignty of Good" Murdoch states:

[The ego] is reluctant to face unpleasant realities. Its consciousness is not normally transparent glass through which it views the world, but a cloud of more or less fantastic reverie designated to protect the psyche from pain. It constantly seeks consolation, either through imagined inflation of self or through fictions of a theological nature. ("The Sovereignty of Good" 364)

Murdoch's use of the word 'fantasy' begs for a clear definition. In "The Sublime and the Good" she sets out the difference between fantasy and imagination. The act of imagination is a creative, active use of the mind's power to envisage, and is a highly valued skill. In Murdoch's understanding, imagination allows us to feel empathy, to comprehend the situation of other human beings and to overcome our egoistic instincts. Fantasy, on the other hand, is

closely connected with the vast, dark regions of our subconsciousness. It helps to feed the Ego with the ideas which dull our cognitive abilities (“The Sublime and the Good” 216). The fantasies, which we find so appealing, appear to be some sort of mental constructs, the content of which is inspired by our most deeply hidden desires. In “Art and Eros: A Dialogue about Art”, Murdoch’s experiment with the classical genre, her ideas concerning the quality of our inner lives are also revealed in a detailed way. In the dialogue Murdoch presents the following picture of our consciousness:

I think that the human mind, the human soul is a vast region most of which is dark. [...] There are dark low levels where we are hardly individual people at all. [...] This darkness is sex, power, desire, inspiration, *energy* for good or evil. Many people live their whole lives in that sort of darkness, seeing nothing but flickering shadows and illusions, like images thrown on a screen - and the only energy they ever have, comes from egoism and dreams. They don’t know what the real world is like at all. Not only could they not understand any difficult thought, they cannot even *see* ordinary things - like that wine cup or the face of Socrates - because anxiety and selfishness are making them blind, they live behind a dark veil. (“Art and Eros” 488)

Murdoch observes that instead of being rational individuals approaching reality with open minds, we are largely motivated by our egoistic instincts. Our natural propensity for intellectual narcissism prevents us from attending to reality objectively and propels the creation of fantasies. Analysis of Murdoch’s philosophical writings allows us to trace the link between her ideas concerning our intellectual life and Plato’s depiction of an educated man in his Allegory of the Cave. The similarity lies in Murdoch’s persistent reference to shadows and illusions in her description, which echoes Plato’s representation. The predilection for fantasy, according to Murdoch, seems to be similar to the slavish attachment to passing shadows described by Plato. Furthermore, in the dialogue Murdoch acknowledges that the picture of consciousness preoccupied with shadows constitutes a status quo of our intellectual lives. In her study *Iris Murdoch’s Contemporary Retrieval of Plato*, Sonja Zuba emphasizes that “[l]ike Plato, [Murdoch] is a moral realist with the Good at the centre of her philosophical world, and the myth of the Cave, taken from Plato’s *Republic*” (90). According to Zuba, Plato and his Allegory of the Cave provide Murdoch with a necessary model to describe the nuances of human nature.

Murdoch’s appropriation of Plato’s allegory is also traceable in the representation of the changes taking place in a character’s consciousness as described in her novels. Her description of human consciousness, similarly to Plato’s model, is also dominated by the

natural propensity to fantasize, to rely on the constant flux of shadows. To describe the consciousness immersed in the fantasies, so evocative of Plato's depiction of the cave-dwellers, Murdoch employs various intertextual references. She seems to select with care the texts and authors with whom she wants to engage in debate about human nature. To compare her Platonic model with other pictures of human nature circulating in culture and exercising some influence, Murdoch furnishes her description of the pilgrimage from reflection to reality with many literary allusions, inviting a revaluation of the Western literary canon.

The Gothic is a recurrent genre used by Murdoch to evoke the state of *eikasia*. In her fiction Gothic elements appear in *The Unicorn*, *The Italian Girl*, *The Sea, the Sea*, *The Good Apprentice*, *An Accidental Man* and finally in *The Time of the Angels*.<sup>67</sup> The last novel on the list will be used as a representative of the whole group of novels which, I believe, share the characteristic of conveying the immersion in the fantasies, in other words, the consciousness in state of *eikasia*, through Gothic elements.

Written in 1966, *The Time of the Angels* employs many of the elements traditionally associated with the Gothic convention. Murdoch's play with the genre is perceptible in the panoply of characters she introduces. Carel Fisher, an eccentric Anglican priest, is cast in the role of a villain who terrorizes his whole household. Apart from a recusant Rector, a type of weak clergy, there is a ruffian, also characteristic of the genre, in the person of Leo Peshkov. He threatens the seemingly peaceful existence of Carel's niece, Elisabeth, a virgin maiden suffering from some mysterious illness and thereby separated from the outside world. Pattie O'Driscoll, a black servant, a social and intellectual pariah, features in the story as an outcast and is Carel's secret mistress. Finally, to complete the array of Gothic characters, Murdoch introduces Marcus Fisher, a witty hero, who attempts to face the despot and save the inhabitants of the Rectory from his brother Carel's tyranny.

As well as in the stock-characterization, the influence of the Gothic convention is noticeable in the novel's settings. Following the dictum of the genre, the plot of *The Time of the Angels* is set in an old Rectory, located in central London, which is meaningfully separated from the vibrant life of the capital by the ever present fog: "Ever since their arrival

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<sup>67</sup> In *Understanding Iris Murdoch* Cheryl Browning Bove states that Gothic elements can also be traced in *The Flight from the Enchanter* and in *Bruno's Dream*. She believes that Mischa Fox appearing in *The Flight from Enchanter* is an example of Gothic protagonist. The character of Lisa Watkins appearing in *Bruno's Dream* has been discussed by Boye as an example of sequestered virgin. Moreover, Bove claims that the setting in the second novel can be classified as Gothic. The elements discussed by the critic are less conspicuous and in my opinion are not convincing enough to add these two novels to the list presented above.

the fog had enclosed them, and she still had very little conception of the exterior of the Rectory. It seemed rather to have no exterior and, like the unimaginable circular universes [...], to have absorbed all other space into its substance” (*The Time of the Angels* 21). The atmosphere of confinement which dominates the novel is created by Murdoch to render the mental state of *eikasia* because apart from the fog, the author uses other elements of the Gothic setting like dark corridors and secluded interiors to evoke associations with the Cave described by Plato. Her characters, immersed in the world of fantasies, roam the dark corridors of their consciousness oblivious to the outside world. The darkness enshrouding the Rectory serves the purpose of mirroring their claustrophobic fear of the real world. In “The Return of the Repressed: Gothic and the 1960s Novel” Bart Moore-Gilbert observes that linking the Gothic with a realistic psychological framework is a characteristic feature of the British novels of the 1960s inspired by the Gothic tradition. He points out that the ‘domestication’ of modern Gothic in the form of a more ordinary social milieu and the lack of supernatural aspects “relates to its most important insights, that the everyday and the ‘normal’ may be sources of horror and terror quite as potent as anything conceived by earlier Gothic” (Moore-Gilbert 144).

In *The Time of the Angels* the horror and terror behind the mundane is especially evident in the characters’ obsessive preoccupation with certain ideas. The portrayal of the relationship between Pattie O’Driscoll and Father Caryl and Murdoch’s description of the ideas that inspire them may serve as a case in point. Pattie, the housekeeper in the Rectory, is portrayed as a person troubled by many questions concerning her identity. She lives with the conviction that she will never be loved or understood because of her skin colour. Being half Irish and half Jamaican she is exceedingly aware of standing out in British society. Paying too much attention to her own racial distinctiveness prevents Pattie from establishing proper relationships with other people. As she observes, “Whiteness seemed to join all the white people together in a cosy union, but blackness divided the black, each into the loneliness of his own special hue” (*The Time of the Angels* 25).

Murdoch draws our attention to the problem of cultural representations of race and the ways in which they inform Pattie’s relationship with people surrounding her. The writer does so by alluding to one of the most canonical English novels combining Gothicism with Romanticism, Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847). Pattie, said to be born in an attic room, reminds us of Brontë’s colonial narrative depicting the dark-skinned Bertha Mason. Both women are largely misunderstood and accused of being mentally challenged. Additionally,

they are also involved in a strange romantic relationship with the master of the house and are treated as shameful secrets.

Father Carel, Pattie's employer, and the first person who takes a special interest in her, is depicted as being deeply influenced by Heidegger. Carel, an atheistic priest on the verge of a mental breakdown and infected by Heidegger's picture of the world, constructs a theological system which is an amalgam of Heidegger's ideas and his own reinterpretation of Christian theology, and within which Pattie becomes a 'dark angel', the dark counterpart of the Virgin Mary. Her skin colour appeals to Carel's fantasy, as he turns her into a "black goddess", a "counter-virgin", an "Anti-Maria" (*The Time of the Angels* 149). Using a traditional Christian prayer, the Ave Maria or the Angelic Salutation, he gives her these names and addresses her in the following way: "Hail, Pattie, full of grace, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou among women" (*The Time of the Angels* 150).

For years they have lived in this strange arrangement fomented by Carel's deepening mental illness but his alluring fantasy, initially shared by Pattie, is shown to be gradually rejected and dispelled. With the appearance of Eugene Peshkov, a man who really falls in love with Pattie, she is forced to rethink her situation. The complicated process of restructuring her self-perception and the dispelling of false images is rendered by Murdoch through the depiction of Pattie's relation to various texts, and the influence they have on her. Pattie's reading routines stand in a direct opposition to Carel's fascination with Heidegger. Pattie, on the other hand, is presented as incapable of understanding *Sein und Zeit*, the book in Carel's possession, and pushes him slowly towards mental illness and suicide. For her, "The words sounded senseless and awful, like the distant boom of some big catastrophe" (*The Time of Angels* 144). Pattie enjoys reading poems, because they "resembled songs and charms or nursery rhymes, fragments that could be musically murmured" (*The Time of the Angels* 26). The simplicity of the way she experiences art helps her to develop immunity to Carel's authoritative fantasies and this seems to constitute for Murdoch a recipe for liberation from the Cave of illusion.

Pattie manages to set herself free because of her resistance towards universalizing ideas. It seems that all of Murdoch's captives depicted in *The Time of the Angels* are presented as entangled with different types of ideas, fantasies usually filling the gap created by the fall of the grand narratives which used to be the traditional providers of meaning and are presented by Murdoch as losing their significance.<sup>68</sup> The predicament of the characters entrapped in the

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<sup>68</sup> Grand narrative or "master narrative" is a term introduced by Jean-François Lyotard in his classic 1979 work *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*.



Gothic convention and in the prison of deluding fantasies provokes a discussion on the role of ideas replacing grand narratives at the time of demythologization and ideological decay. Religion which traditionally used to guarantee a continuity of values is shown as being slowly rejected and replaced with new constructs chiefly composed of fantasies. Compared with its predecessors, such personal fantasies rarely receive a critical evaluation. Left without ideological systems of support, Murdochian characters are shown weaving their own alternative systems and constructing their ideas inspired by material circulating in their immediate cultural background, which, however, separates them from the world they try to understand. By modelling their ideas on bad material they are shown to produce fantasies in which they end up immersed. The fantasies of Murdoch's characters are deeply connected to their cultural heritage and appear to mirror the ideas to which they are exposed. Therefore, one may conclude that the characters of Murdoch seem to be involved in the process of constant re-contextualizing. Re-contextualising involves extracting texts and meanings from their original context and introducing them into another context. In case of Murdoch's characters, the models of behaviour are derived from culture and the context is provided by the narcissist consciousness, the centre of their inner life. Therefore, the content intercepted from culture will be discussed as undergoing a peculiar transformation in the consciousness of Murdoch's characters, which involves retaining some of the features of the original, but at the same time becomes a reinterpretation fulfilling the needs of the Ego. Muriel, Carel's daughter, a poet in the making, shows some proneness to Romantic tradition in the way that she interprets her cousin's life. Young Leo Peshkov displays a strong sentimental attachment to chivalric romance and uses this genre as a model for describing his love adventures as a quest. Carel, the obsessive reader of Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*, is inspired by the ideas in that book to construct his own quasi-theological system and place himself at the centre of his anti-theology. Every fantasy these characters produce is shown as being influenced by their interests in various concepts, often derived from texts, which contribute to their self-imposed alienation from reality. Thus Murdoch's characters are depicted as being conditioned by their cultural heritage and as trapped by their fantasies inspired by the appealing ideas.

Analysis of *The Time of the Angels* confirms that the use of the Gothic, a genre which, as Conradi observes, "has always exploited the gap between reason and imagination" and which "displays the frailties of reason, together with the potentially devilish nature of imagination" (*The Saint and the Artist* 171), is closely connected to Murdoch's unique picture of human consciousness as entrapped or enslaved by various ideas and images. The entrapment is rendered through the Gothic convention. The Gothic is used in Murdoch's novels to signal the

need to return to reality which individuals tend to abandon too readily. The genre which originally served as a counterbalance to a confident worldview provided by scientific development, here seems to open the possibility of a return to reality by conscious embracement of the 'dark forces' it investigates.

In her first novel, *Under the Net*, Murdoch uses another popular genre to render the state of intellectual *eikasia*, the inner life governed by a predilection to daydreaming. Written as an autobiographical account, *Under the Net* ingenuously employs the genre of the picaresque. The story is told in a series of loosely connected adventures or episodes which feature the character of Jake Donaghue. Jake, who has just arrived back in London, discovers that he has been evicted by his previous landlord. Together with his distant relative, Finn, Jake is forced to roam the streets of London to find new lodgings. In accordance with the dictum of the genre, during this escapade he performs a variety of tasks and becomes entangled in many unexpected events such as spending the night in the Riverside Miming Theatre, getting trapped in an apartment on Welbeck Street, and kidnapping an Alsatian star dog named Mars for the purpose of blackmail.

Conradi summarizes the appeal of the novel in the following way: "an episodic account of the boozy journeyings of a quixotic, illusion-ridden knight and his squire" (*The Saint and the Artist* 34). He also emphasizes that Murdoch's play with the picaresque is evident in the relationship between Finn and Jake. Jake, who is modelled on Don Quixote, tends to manifest his self-asserted superiority over Finn, his faithful companion. As Conradi notes, "Finn is the first of a series of Murdoch's characters who disappear from the narrative [...] without ever having been properly apprehended. Their demise or disappearance is a direct result, we are made to feel, of the failure of the other characters to imagine their needs, or to see them as other than 'subsidiary' characters" (*The Saint and the Artist* 39). Focused on his own role in the adventures, Jake fails to see that Finn has his own story too. The depiction of their relationship suggests that his egoistic psyche sets Jake in the role of the hero and relegates the other to the role of subsidiary, whose story is just a subplot.

Her use of the picaresque genre, apart from denoting Jake's immersion in the realm of fantasy, expresses Murdoch's scepticism about our ability to change from ever experiencing ourselves as self-centred and self-involved heroes, the role in which we are cast by the Ego. In the picaresque genre the main character does not change his or her nature, the feature which seems to be appropriated here for the purpose of presenting the concept of the enslaved

consciousness. The circumstances of the picaresque character may change, but they rarely result in a change of heart, which converges with Murdoch's model of consciousness permanently immersed in fantasies. In her rendition of Jake's adventures, Murdoch inscribes her ideas concerning the true nature of our abilities through the skilful employment of the genre of the picaresque. The picaresque genre, which conditions the character to participate in a series of actions and which, instead of progress, denotes intellectual stagnation, in the context of Murdoch's interest in Plato signals the affirmation of his model. In *Under the Net* the possibility of epiphany is realistically depicted. Instead of some sudden rush of overflowing wisdom, in the novel we witness a rare and quiet realization of one's shortcomings. For Jake, the critical moment comes at the end of the book, when he ponders the genetic mystery of the cat's multi-coloured fur. Jake, whose attention is truly grasped by the painfully prosaic activity of observing kittens, experiences a short but lasting moment of de-selfing. For a brief moment Jake's attitude to the surrounding reality is governed by humbleness and sheer awe and this closing scene provides a contrast to all of his hectic adventures.

Apart from using the picaresque genre to illustrate the limited potential for progress or mental change, Murdoch's use of the picaresque invites comparison with another famous text containing an influential picture of human nature, James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922). In "Love and Vision: Iris Murdoch on Eros and the Individual" Martha Nussbaum observes that James Joyce is "the artist who is the clearest antitype for Murdoch" ("Love and Vision" 49). Nussbaum emphasizes that Joyce rejects the relevance of a Platonic ascent and glorifies in his fiction "the body and its smells and its odd deflections from rationality" ("Love and Vision" 49). For Joyce "the body is not the route to metaphysics; metaphysics, insofar as it has a function, is a route to the body" ("Love and Vision" 50). Joyce's attitude towards sexuality and his nomination of the sexual experience as the ultimate goal of our earthly pilgrimage, stands in a direct opposition to Plato's ideal and Murdoch's own vision. The theme of the journey understood as the apotheosis of Low Eros and the exploration of pure sexuality is a point of divergence between Murdoch and Joyce. In *Under the Net* Jake goes to France to find his ex-lover Anna Quentin, only to realize that he is chasing a shadow, not the actual person. Anna, the woman chased by Jake, turns out to be an illusion. Their romantic story purveys a different message, which contradicts Joyce's vision. In Murdoch's novel the Joycean object of reverence is shown as the source of misconceptions about the reality. In Murdoch's use of the picaresque the significance of the journey, the chase itself, has been reduced to a humorous

farce which undermines the significance ascribed to adventure and experience in Joyce's artistic vision. Consequently, apart from inscribing Jake and Finn in the picaresque frame in order to present the protagonist as overwhelmed by the Ego's fantasies, Murdoch's use of the picaresque invites a comparison of her Platonic model with the Joycean alternative.

The education of a naïve hero who struggles with entrapment in his fantasies and is depicted with reference to a literary classic can also be found in *The Book and the Brotherhood* in which Murdoch exploits the tradition of adventure fiction. In this novel Murdoch enters into a dialogue with the author of *Gulliver's Travels* and evokes Swift's satirical portrayal of human nature. Swift's work is essentially a parody of travellers' tales, as well as being a systematic rebuttal of Defoe's optimistic account of human capability.<sup>69</sup> Gulliver in Swift's rendition progresses from the cheery optimist of the opening section to the pompous misanthrope of the book's conclusion. We get an insight into Swift's approach to the subject of human nature from his letter to Pope on September 29, 1725. In this letter Swift claims that *Gulliver's Travels* is to "present the truth about human nature in opposition to illusion. He points out that man is incorrectly described as 'animal rationale' but really is only 'rationis capax'" (quoted in Firdaus and Jan 17). The dethronement of reason and the acknowledgment of the role of the unconscious is something to which Murdoch seems to relate. Similarly to Swift, Murdoch seems to be keen to emphasize that the capacity to think rationally is overestimated, thus we cannot depend on our rational reasoning to lead a healthy moral life. Will power and reason, as Swift believes, are not the sole architects of our destiny.

In *The Book and the Brotherhood*, the first link between the Swift's text and Murdoch's depiction of intellectual pilgrimage is established by the choice of the character's name, Gulliver Ashe. As well as the name, the author inserts numerous allusions to *Gulliver's Travels*, by stylizing the adventures of her character to echo those of his literary predecessor. Gulliver falls asleep at the Oxford Ball with which the novel opens and when he wakes up he meets Lily Boyne, a woman who reminds him of "a rather small crazy pirate, perhaps a cabin boy on a pirate ship in a pantomime" (*The Book and the Brotherhood* 35). From that moment on Gulliver sails out on a journey to learn something about himself and his place in the world.

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<sup>69</sup> Jonathan Swift was concerned to refute the notion that the individual precedes society, as Daniel Defoe's novel seems to suggest. Swift regarded such thought as a dangerous endorsement of Thomas Hobbes' radical political philosophy and for this reason Gulliver repeatedly encounters established societies rather than desolate islands.

The motif of the journey is connected to the problem of Gulliver's lost identity. Gulliver pictures himself as an outsider in every sense of this word. Even though he is occasionally invited to the meetings of the Brotherhood, he feels that he does not belong there. The group from which he strives to gain acceptance consists predominantly of Oxford graduates, Duncan Cambus, Jenkin Riderhood, and Gerard Hernshaw, whereas he attended a different university. His inability to fit into the group is mirrored in his inability to find a place in the job market. Struggling with unemployment, he realizes that he becomes more and more economically excluded. The confusion he feels about his standing in the social hierarchy also has an equivalent in the confusion he feels about his own sexuality. He used to tour gay bars and engaged in a quick romance with an emotionally unavailable older man. His meeting with Lily, another person who aspires to join the intellectual élite of the Brotherhood, confuses him even more because he feels that he has discovered a perfect partner, an eccentric like himself.

The challenges posed by reality amount in Gulliver's experience to serious frustration and a sense of isolation. The lack of *joie de vivre* he feels manifests itself in the taking up by Gulliver of the role of a solitary recluse, which is connected with his perception of Romantic ideas: "There are times when man has to be *alone, really alone*" (*The Book and the Brotherhood* 421). In taking up the role of the suffering loner he displays a propensity to turn the idea of his struggle into a narrative evocative of the sufferings of a Romantic hero. Gulliver is shown struggling to resist the temptation of sailing in the direction of solipsistic Romanticism: "Gulliver was serious in his resolve to embrace his misfit role and 'be no one', yet all the same he could not help glimpsing himself in the future as *someone*" (*The Book and the Brotherhood* 428).

The search for identity and the motif of the journey continue to dominate Gulliver's adventures, but, similarly to the adventures of her other characters, Murdoch confronts his fantasies with reality. The moment of realization comes with Gulliver's attempt to leave London. He ends up completely lost and confused at King's Cross Station where he meets an impoverished man whom he perceives as a sort of alter ego. At first Gulliver instinctively hates the stranger, but after overcoming his initial antipathy, he even ponders whether he should give the poor beggar his coat, his last valuable possession. As Murdoch emphasizes, Gulliver's reasoning in this eerie moment is governed by superstition, by a naïve belief that a good deed like that can save his future and bring him good fortune. Such a belief was probably inscribed in his memory by numerous plots of familiar stories praising good deeds as the means of preventing a dismal future. The symbolic gesture Gulliver is tempted to

perform represents the proneness to inscribe one's life into a narrative, the force which is called in the novel "a demon in disguise" (*The Book and the Brotherhood* 432). Eventually, Gulliver decides to keep his coat, an action which demonstrates that one may overcome the urge to indulge in the Ego's falsifying images. He is thus shown resisting the temptation of making his life into some kind of allegory or popular plot. What actually changes Gulliver's predicament is an accidental meeting which follows his intellectual victory over the superstitious coat dilemma, and the role of pure accident in Gulliver's travels seems to serve the purpose of breaking the convention in which the character is potentially trapped. The Romantic outlook, here symptomatic of *eikasia*, is indirectly challenged by Murdoch through a literary allusion containing a Platonic reference, a poem by A. E. Housman which Gulliver finds himself repeating quite often: "The rainy Pleiads wester, Orion plunges prone, the stroke of midnight ceases, and I lie down alone. The rainy Pleiads wester, and seek beyond the sea, the head that I shall dream of, and 'twill not dream of me" (*The Book and the Brotherhood* 135).<sup>70</sup> The narrator of the novel comments that the poem is "a rendering of some Greek thing" which "was often, during these days, repeated to himself by Gulliver Ashe as a kind of liturgy, not exactly a prayer" (*The Book and the Brotherhood* 135). The poem, which is said to bring Gulliver some comfort in desperate times, emphasizes the importance of contemplation of a metaphysical object, rather than brooding over one's inner self, the message which seems to converge with Plato's objective to reflect on the idea of Good and to turn it into the centre of our attention.

Gulliver Ashe represents a whole group of Murdochian characters whose endeavour to leave the cave is depicted through literary allusions exploring the tradition of adventure fiction. In her dialogue with the literary canon Murdoch also re-appropriates the *epos*, a literary genre dating back to Antiquity and Homer's *Odyssey*. In *An Accidental Man*, Murdoch uses this genre which, similarly to adventure fiction, revolves around a series of ventures undertaken by the protagonist, Austin Gibson Grey, who pictures himself as a modern Odysseus trying to find his way back into his marriage with Dorina. However, in his attempt to restore a good relationship with his wife, a pure and emotionally fragile woman, Austin finds consolation in the arms of Mitzi Ricardo, a close friend, whom he uses without scruple to reach his objectives. The period of separation from his idealized wife is viewed by Austin as a stay on Circe's island:

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<sup>70</sup> The quotation of A.E. Housman's poem is taken directly from Murdoch's novel. Therefore, relying on Murdoch's rendition of it, the slashes between the verses are not added here.

We are on an island [...] I'm thingummybob and you're what's-her-name, years and years on this island and all this time there's a wee wifie waiting. [...] And the wee wifie's waiting and turning her spinning wheel like a bloody sibyl and the years are passing and all the time I'm down on the beach crying my eyes out because the great big nymphie won't let me go home. (*An Accidental Man* 65)

The role of Circe the enchantress in Odysseus's return may be compared to the workings of the Ego, which, similarly to the goddess of magic, is the source of false images and illusions.

The story of Odysseus is mentioned by Murdoch in *The Sea, the Sea, The Nice and the Good, The Green Knight, The Unicorn, Under the Net, The Unicorn* as well as in *An Accidental Man*, providing in each novel an important intertextual frame informing the behaviour of her characters. In *An Accidental Man* Murdoch uses the literary reference to Homer to achieve a comic effect and to break free from the pathos of epic. The narrative indicates that Austin has been staying at his friend's house only for two days, whereas in Austin's estimation he was kept there forever. The exaggeration present in Austin's perception of events, in comparison with reality, creates a comic dissonance. The seriousness and gravity of the character's musings about his existence are relieved by Murdoch's incorporation of the story of Odysseus, an incorporation which exploits the genre and breaks with its conventions. The adventures of both men are juxtaposed to reveal that the Homeric version of the pilgrimage cannot be easily projected and imposed onto the 'narration' of real life where accidents disturb the smooth progress. Murdoch's description of Austin's adventures illustrates that, contrary to Homer's optimistic vision, not every obstacle may be overcome with wit and good reasoning. The ideas promoted by Homer embrace the picture of an individual who divides people into enemies and friends, who succumbs to temptation and is a man of action, and these are values which according to Murdoch do not conform to the idea of becoming Good and thus do not constitute a good role model.

These examples from *The Book and the Brotherhood* and *An Accidental Man* illustrate that references to the tradition of adventure fiction, whether picaresque, heroic epic, or the kind of travel narrative written by Swift, vary in Murdoch's novels yet always serve to signal a predilection for the false imagery offered by the Ego. Murdoch's invocation of various literary conventions and her engagement with different cultural traditions serve her purpose of presenting human consciousness as being ineluctably involved with cultural heritage which may lead to a certain intellectual and emotional entrapment. This entrapment, evocative of the

situation described in The Allegory of the Cave, reflects the difficulty of intellectually detaching and critically assessing the cultural heritage in which one is placed. Murdoch's characters are depicted as being trapped inside various conventions imposed by the author, but also by the fantasies fabricated by the characters themselves. Easily influenced by the stereotypes handed down to them by various cultural products, Murdoch's characters are shown to duplicate the models. Thus popular genres, conventions and models invade the consciousness of the characters depicted by Murdoch and influence their perception, governing the way in which they explain chains of events and how they relate to other human beings. Murdoch's use of intertextuality, dialogic in its nature, initiates a debate with various traditions. From Swift's scepticism towards our rational capacity, to the Joycean enthusiastic embracement of low instincts, Murdoch seeks to evaluate different concepts of human nature which influence the way we perceive ourselves and to inscribe them into her own vision. By using intertextual references she juxtaposes her Platonic vision with other, sometimes extremely popular literary representations of human consciousness.

It seems that for Murdoch a literary counterpart of the human consciousness dwelling in the cave of illusions, the consciousness in the state of *eikasia*, is the model of consciousness epitomized by 'the existential hero'. This image, according to Murdoch is: "attractive, and indeed to most of us still natural, because it suggests individualism, self-reliance and private conscience" ("Existentialists and Mystics" 224). The existentialist hero is further defined by Murdoch as follows:

We know this novel and its hero well. The story of the lonely brave man, defiant without optimism, proud without pretension, always an exposé of shams, whose mode of being is a deep criticism of society. He is an adventurer. He is godless. He does not suffer from guilt. He thinks of himself as free. He may have faults, he may be self-assertive or even violent, but he has sincerity and courage and for this we forgive him. [...] His will, that adventurous instrument which makes him so different from sticks and stones and billiard balls and greengrocers and bank managers, his will is separate from the rest of his being and uncontaminated. He *might* do anything. ("Existentialists and Mystics" 225)

Murdoch assumes that the existentialist hero is a product of something she characterizes as 'a current view' on human consciousness ("Vision and Choice" 77). She points out that according to this current view:

The moral life of an individual is a series of overt choices which take place in a series of specifiable situations. The individual's 'stream of consciousness' is of comparatively little importance, partly because it



is often not there at all (having to be thought continuous for wrong reasons), and more pertinently because it is and can only be through overt acts that we can characterise another person, or ourselves, mentally and morally. ("Vision and Choice in Morality" 77)

The figure has its roots in what Murdoch calls "the Romantic Kantian Man" who abolished God and took His place in return. In Murdoch's view, the Romantic Movement overshadowed Kant's idea of *Achtung*, the respect for the moral law, by putting too much emphasis on the idea of *Angst*, dread or anxiety. By emphasizing defiant alienation, Existentialism and Romanticism are tightly intertwined in their philosophical inspirations. During her philosophical career Murdoch expressed numerous doubts about the psychological accuracy of this model. Considered too optimistic and even naïve, the figure is contested by Murdoch by the means of intertextual dialogue, as was illustrated in *The Book and the Brotherhood*. In Murdoch's depiction of human consciousness immersed in fantasies, she employs various literary traditions which, according to her, contain and embrace the false picture of reality she attempts to replace. For her references, Murdoch chooses a representative of so called 'crystalline' literature, the literature conveying the picture of reality transfigured by the order and unity imposed by the formal nature of art. In *The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited* Murdoch states: "Romanticism in its final, purest and most undiluted form is the triumph of neurosis, the triumph of myth as solipsistic form" ("The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited" 279). She mentions T.S. Eliot and T.E. Hulme as contemporary representatives of this way of thinking about the world and claims that Romanticism is evident in their willingness to escape from the existing messy modern world to "the institution and dogma, the presumed clarity and cleanliness of the medieval world" ("The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited" 274).

Analysis of Murdoch's novels shows that her perception of human nature is not only anti-Romantic, but is deeply influenced by Plato's philosophical thought. The image of a slave relying on the continuum of shadows to construct his own picture of reality seems to prevail in Murdoch's novels. As her novels demonstrate, Murdoch indulges in portrayals of slaves who desperately struggle to disperse the false images that constrain them. In Murdoch's novels the examples of slaves who manage to escape from the cave are extremely rare.<sup>71</sup> Moments of epiphany, of a proper apprehension of reality, are also very rare and usually depicted as fleeting, compared with the numerous pictures of fantasy-induced stagnancy.

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<sup>71</sup>In *The Sea, the Sea* James is portrayed as one of the few who achieve enlightenment in Murdoch's fiction. It is rumored that he was even able to choose the time of his death.

### III.4 From a fictional hero to a real-life moral agent. The link between cultural products and moral choices in Murdoch's fiction

The analysis of the influence of cultural heritage on characters' outlook conducted in the previous subchapter reveals that certain models of behaviour may easily exist in the consciousness as intermediaries.<sup>72</sup> Derived from their encompassing cultural heritage, the models are principal organizing structures used to understand an overwhelmingly chaotic and undefinable reality. However, as the examples of Tom in *The Philosopher's Pupil* or Rosa in *The Flight from the Enchanter* show, not all models and scenarios are equally useful and not every idea incorporated from cultural heritage is worth embracing. It has been argued that cultural products in Murdoch's depiction may serve as dangerously easy options, and that reliance on them prevents her characters from intellectual development.

The following subchapter develops the argument that as well as using literary references to illustrate the state of *eikasia*, Murdoch also employs intertextuality to provoke discussion of the role of cultural products in our moral lives. At this point it must be stated that in Murdoch's novels we find allusions to various art forms like theatre, opera or classical music. Opera features prominently in *The Black Prince* in which Bradley and Julian attend Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier*.<sup>73</sup> Other examples of this art form being assigned a meaningful role by Murdoch can be found in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* which features references to *Don Giovanni*, *Fidelio*, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, and Monteverdi's *L'Incoronazione di Poppea*. Famous classical music pieces are mentioned and symbolically employed in *The Italian Girl* (Wagner, Sibelius) and in *The Time of the Angels* (Tchaikovsky).

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<sup>72</sup> The influence of literature on what people desire has been examined also by René Girard, who distinguishes between 'imitation' and 'mimesis': imitation is characterized as the basic mechanism of learning whereas mimesis is perceived to be its negative counterpart used to refer to the deeper, instinctive response that humans have to each other. One of Girard's fundamental concepts is 'mimetic desire' which involves imitating other people's desires. The process in which a person influences the desires and preferences of another person is called 'mediation'. Thus, whenever a person's desire is imitated by someone else, she or he becomes a 'mediator' or 'model'. Girard distinguishes between an external and internal mediation. In the former, literary texts and characters function as models of desire. For further detail see Girard, René and Robert Doran, *Mimesis and Theory: Essays on Literature and Criticism, 1955 -2005* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2008).

<sup>73</sup> The opera has a symbolic meaning because it involves sexual partners of grossly different ages, similar to the one in *The Black Prince*. While Bradley and Julian will have a love affair, as the Princess and Octavian did, both Julian and Octavian will eventually leave their older lovers and find partners their own age.

Apart from these diversified art forms Murdoch uses references to literary works to describe art's influence on our consciousness.<sup>74</sup>

The correlation between the characters' moral life and the texts that shape their worldview constitutes an important element of Murdoch's philosophical musings. One example supporting this claim is to be found in her copy of *An Examination of Plato's Doctrines* by Ian Crombie in which Murdoch underlined the following sentence: 'He [Socrates] assumes that we tend to become like the characters in the books which we admire' (91 Murdoch's emphasis). The underlined fragment illustrates Murdoch's interest in the influence of texts on readers. Another signal that confirms Murdoch's preoccupation with the topic can be found in her own philosophical writings. Take for instance her essay "The Fire and the Sun" in which she expresses a conviction echoing the statement underlined in Crombie's book. In the essay Murdoch claims that: "We are infected by playing or enjoying a bad role. Art can do cumulative psychological harm in this way" ("The Fire and the Sun" 390). These examples demonstrate that for Murdoch the connection between the moral life and art constitutes a valid area of intellectual inquiry.

Murdoch's artistic attempts to explore the correlation between moral life and cultural products are most visible in her novels. A short introduction to Murdoch's treatment of this correlation may be provided by the survey of the characters and various literary traditions they are fond of as depicted in *The Book and the Brotherhood*. At the annual Reading Party held by the Brotherhood at Boyars, an old country house, it is customary for the guests to bring with them the books they plan to read during their stay. The choices they make seem to correlate to their mental capacities and their general outlook on life. Gulliver, a simpleton immersed in Romantic tradition, brings the poems of Lowell and Berryman. Lily, a down-to-earth *nouveau riche*, brings a travel book on Thailand. Gerard, a theoretician with Platonic inclinations, brings Horace's *Odes* and a volume of Plotinus in the Loeb edition. Rose, a sentimental English lady, brings George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*. Jenkin, the epitome of selfless goodness, brings *The Oxford Book of Spanish Verse*, a Portuguese grammar, and a book by a Jesuit titled *Socialism and the New Theology*. Tamar, a submissive character who is struggling to gain some substance, does not bring any books, but retires to the library to find

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<sup>74</sup> Anne Rowe's study of Iris Murdoch's fiction conducted in *The Visual Arts and the Novels of Iris Murdoch* (Lampeter: Mellen Press, 2002) reveals the influence of the visual arts on the characters' consciousness and argues that they serve as vital inspiration for many thematic and formal aspects of Iris Murdoch's fiction.

one (*The Book and the Brotherhood* 229). This summary of different types of characters and their literary preferences illustrates how the book titles may function as indicators of certain ideas each character is preoccupied with, thus giving the insight into their consciousness.

The evasive nature of this relation can be further explained by analysing the portrayal of Uncle Tim, a character introduced in *Jackson's Dilemma*, Murdoch's last novel. Tim Barnell figures in the novel as a powerful presence. Even though he is no longer alive, he is still revered, beloved and admired by his friends and relatives. He is referred to as 'the great uncle Tim' and undoubtedly remains a source of authority, a moral compass guiding their choices. The appeal of Tim has a magnetic quality. Symbolically named after *Timaeus*, Plato's famous dialogue, Uncle Tim seems to represent a towering idea of the Good. What is particularly interesting in Murdoch's portrayal of Tim is that her evocation of his unique presence is rendered through the legacy he left behind, namely his library. His personality and outlook are left for the reader to reconstruct through the books he read and cherished. The list of Tim's favourites include *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, *Lord Jim*, *Treasure Island*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Kim* and *Kafka*.<sup>75</sup> Tim was a talented mathematician and an engineer, but most of all he loved reading and he often quoted lines from his favourite authors. These so called 'Tim's tags' were quotations taken from: "Shakespeare, sentences out of Conrad, Dostoyevsky, Dickens, *Alice in Wonderland*, *The Wind in the Willows*, Kipling, Robert Louis Stevenson" (*Jackson's Dilemma* 9). This habit illustrates the unabated presence of concepts and ideas taken from literary works in Tim's mental framework and proves the import of literary inspiration in his life.

Benet, his nephew, summarizes the appeal of his collection as well as the elusive nature of Tim's presence in the following way:

In a strange way the books, which were indeed not all 'classics', were somehow deeply soaked in some spirit of the Ancient World. Benet had sometimes tried to analyse this atmosphere, this rich aroma, this trembling resonance, this *wisdom*, but it eluded him, leaving him simply to bask within it. [...] Tim's books were indeed adventure stories as Benet saw them in his own childhood; but as he grew up he saw more in his uncle and his tales, a sort of warm ringing undertone, a gentle compassionate light or sound, an awareness of the tragedy of human life, good and evil, crime and punishment, *remorse*. (*Jackson's Dilemma* 10)

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<sup>75</sup>"There's much in James's part in all this of Kipling's *Kim*, a favourite book by Murdoch's, a splendid imperial adventure tale with espionage, a military and spiritual penumbra, and a Tibetan lama to boot" (*The Saint and the Artist* 308).

It is said that Tim must have seen some terrible things in India. Therefore, in order to confront his past he used to look for consolation in literature: “The strange sound was then a sort of silent pain, which he rehearsed again and again among his broken heroes – Macbeth with bloody hands, Othello having killed his wife, the bizarre devastation of Kafka’s people, T.E. Lawrence, Jim jumping from the ship. For consolation, Kim and the Lama” (*Jackson’s Dilemma* 10). The correlation between these cultural products and the changes taking place in the character’s consciousness can be linked to Murdoch’s philosophy and her ideas concerning the influence of our inner life on the decisions we take. Murdoch’s philosophy or “moral psychology”, as she prefers to call it, ascribes great significance to the process of taking actions.<sup>76</sup> In her philosophical writings the author emphasises the importance of a conscious reverie in the decision-making process as opposed to the view that moral judgement is conditioned by our free will. According to Zuba one of the central problems in Murdoch’s moral psychology is constituted by “the contrast between the activity of vision and the will” (129). Zuba explains that Murdoch’s philosophical aim is “to find a way of reclaiming the self, a means of describing the realm of the inner” (121). She claims that Murdoch strives to “recover a philosophical description of the mind or consciousness as a bearer of value, and not merely a neutral surveyor of facts” (Zuba 123). In “The Sovereignty of Good” Murdoch states that moral activity should not be perceived as a merely external action, because it originates in the mind. It is far more complex than is argued by behaviourist philosophers:

Virtue is a good habit and dutiful action. But the background condition of such habit and such action, in human beings, is a just mode of vision and a good quality of consciousness. It is a *task* to come to see the world as it is. A philosophy which leaves duty without a context and exalts the idea of freedom and power as a separate top level value ignores this task and obscures the relation between virtue and reality. We act rightly ‘when the time comes’ not out of strength of will but out of the quality of our usual attachments and with the kind of energy and discernment which we have available. And to this the whole activity of our consciousness is relevant (“The Sovereignty of Good” 375).

Instead of acknowledging the idea of a moral deed as an outward action judged against a certain system of value, Murdoch struggles to include in the picture of moral life also the mental activity directly preceding and following the act in question. A similar conviction is expressed in her essay “Vision and Choice in Morality”, in which Murdoch emphasises that reflection “constitutes a person’s general conceptual attitude which in turn is connected with

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<sup>76</sup> Murdoch introduced the term during her address at the University of Caen, 1978 (quoted in *The Saint and the Artist*).

the moral acts of an individual” (“Vision and Choice in Morality” 85). These quotations from her philosophical essays demonstrate that during her philosophical career Murdoch strove to reconceptualise the idea of consciousness. Although her fiction is not a direct representation of her philosophical ideas, it will be argued in this chapter that the author remains consistent in presenting this preoccupation also in her fiction.

The phenomenon of following the example handed down by certain cultural products, especially literary texts, is a recurring issue in Murdoch’s fiction. She strives to capture the interrelation between certain models of behaviour fossilized in literary traditions and their influence on the moral life of an individual. Her literary works constitute a continuation of her reflection on this issue, creating a chance to explore it more deeply, without the constraints imposed by philosophical discourse. Zuba points out that according to Murdoch: “the boundaries of what may be called ‘consciousness awareness’ or ‘consciousness’ are hazy”, and “some of these outer areas are more easily suggested by novelists and poets than analytically described by philosophers” (125). Murdoch herself stated that a novelist is well suited for the role of an explorer: “A portrayal of moral reflection and moral change (degeneration, improvement) is the most important part of any system of ethics. The explanation of our fallibility in such matters as seeing the worse as the better is more informatively (though of course less systematically) carried out by poets, play-wrights, and novelists” (“The Fire and the Sun” 457).

The dynamic between the sphere of the inner life of an individual consciousness and outward influences was a subject of interest for Plato and may be considered another point of convergence between his ideas and Murdoch’s thought. In her dialogue “Art and Eros”, Murdoch pays tribute to Plato’s inquiry into the role of conscious reflection by establishing a link between conscious reverie and the content with which it occupies itself. Her fictional Socrates, similar to Plato’s character, provokes his interlocutors with questions to advance his philosophical inquiry. He offers the following starting point for their debate: “Isn’t it the nature of art to explore the relation between the public and the private? Art turns us inside out, it exhibits what is secret. What goes on inwardly in the soul is the essence of each man; it’s what makes us individual people. The relation between the inwardness and public conduct is called *morality*” (“Art and Eros” 475).

As this fragment of Murdoch’s dialogue may suggest, what goes on inwardly is furnished by the cultural heritage and, according to Murdoch, this influences moral action. In her novels

the moral consequences of a character's literary preferences are discussed on numerous occasions. Take, for instance, the portrayal of Penn Graham in *An Unofficial Rose*. Penn is a teenage boy who falls in love for the first time. Besotted by Miranda Peronett, his cousin, he is depicted as experiencing the pains of being in love and undergoes a dramatic metamorphosis:

Penn at this stage pictured himself somewhat as a disciple of Courtly Love. He imagined himself Miranda's slave, devoted to her service, running errands for her, or preferably, rescuing her from terrible dangers [...] Service would call forth love and the new Miranda would arise, an apotheosis of the sweetness and power which he so powerfully divined as hidden with the puckish *gamine* who, alas, sometimes enjoyed teasing and tormenting him. (*An Unofficial Rose* 206-207)

Penn's new experience is rendered by Murdoch in terms of chivalric idiom. As well as this reference to chivalric romance, Penn is depicted as humming the lyrics of William Percy's text *Abdul the Bulbul EMIR* which glorifies the heroic life and bravery of two famous soldiers, Ivan Skavinsky Skavar and the eponymous Abdul Abulbul Amir. Penn is also attributed with a substitute for a sword, a Nazi dagger. Evoking further association with chivalric tradition it is mentioned that Penn always wanted to become a soldier and has a passionate interest in matters of weapons, uniforms and machinery of war. The art of war is said to be one of Penn's childhood interests. Sweet memories of playing with soldiers come back to him from the past and represent his innocence.

Filled as he is with romantic feelings which rely on imagery characteristic of the chivalric tradition, violent thoughts begin to haunt Penn. The tower of Grayhallock where Miranda lives "exercised a looking-glass fascination on his mind. Its shallow stairs and steep of white painted metal bannister, the replica of his own, seemed like the approach to Bluebeard's chamber" (*An Unofficial Rose* 74). He wants to stroll up to Miranda's room because the German dagger "took possession of his consciousness in a painful way" (*An Unofficial Rose* 75). The description of the impact the possession of the dagger has on the young boy may suggest that the dagger symbolizes the possibility of moral corruption through violence:

He could feel the dagger heavy inside his pocket, touching his thigh, imparting power. He felt himself lifted to a higher plane of detachment as if some little movement in the mysterious and irreversible process of growing up had become momentarily perceptible. [...] He was a free man, his own judge, and he would do exactly what he pleased. (*An Unofficial Rose* 46)

The childhood hobby is juxtaposed with a fascination with the whole tradition of chivalric romance. The contrast between the childish play with leaden soldiers and treating love as a romantic quest is for Murdoch the source of reflection on the role of culture in shaping the young boy's outlook.

Unrequited love, combined with Miranda's purposeful teasing, brings Penn to the verge of agony. His love, pure and elevating at the beginning, now turns into a source of deep distress: "He began to see her as a demon" (*An Unofficial Rose* 208). He suspects that Miranda's pinches awaken in him something more primitive: "he felt with wretchedness and sometimes with a sort of dark zest, more depraved" (*An Unofficial Rose* 208). The psychological appeal of the dagger combined with Miranda's torments is pushing Penn towards violence. He muses, "perhaps she wanted him to be brutal?", and his initially formless desires slowly turn into sexual fantasies supplemented with visual content: "In the dark stream of his new yearning it was as if he were back at the beginning again and the real Miranda had disappeared. Only that had been heaven whereas this was hell. The first Miranda had been a heavenly vision. The last Miranda was a doll of flesh" (*An Unofficial Rose* 209).

The idea of the quest inspired by chivalric romance is shown as an important factor in the way Penn conceptualizes his first romantic experience. This inspiration, however, clouds his judgement and pushes him towards a reckless exploit. The cultural model of romantic courtship evoked in Penn's characterization turns out to be incompatible with reality. The discrepancy between Penn's idealized picture of Miranda and the reality is signalled by Murdoch also through the characterization of his beloved, which alludes to the character in Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*. Miranda has often been considered a living representation of the traits that make the pinnacle of femininity, namely innocence and vulnerability. In "Rape and Romanticization of Shakespeare's Miranda" Jessica Slights emphasizes that in many studies, "Miranda appears either as an archetype of pliant womanliness or as an allegorical, sentimentalized figure for the tender and fecund aspects of untamed nature" (360). She adds that even feminist critics discuss Miranda as "a prototype of that unlikely invention of Puritan conduct book authors and late twentieth-century scholars: the woman who is chaste, silent and obedient" (Slights 361). In Murdoch's depiction the situation is reversed. Even though she is still a teenage girl, Miranda is presented as a cunning individual, utterly egotistic and oriented towards satisfying her own fantasies. Miranda is the one who plays with Penn's feelings.



The example of 'a knight' who succumbs to cultural representations of love as a quest can also be found in *An Unofficial Rose*. Randall Peronett, in spite of being married to Ann, engages in an affair with Lindsay Rimmer. His affection to Lindsay is expressed via images circulating in culture: "She resembled Diane de Poitiers, and had round small breasts which would have delighted Clouet" (*An Unofficial Rose* 60). To win the heart of the married man, Lindsay tempts Randall by playing the role of an inaccessible Vestal Virgin: "sober, quiet, serviceable, docile, and, alas, chaste" (*An Unofficial Rose* 61). The nature of their arrangement is additionally described through allusion to the Platonic representation of enslaved consciousness. Randall is said to feel like "a favourite slave who has been kept on cushions and fed with sherbet" (*An Unofficial Rose* 118). The passion experienced by Randall is shown to correspond to the state of being dominated by low Eros in Plato's dialogues, thus it can be linked to the state of *eikasia*: "It was as if their eyes had become huge and luminous so that when they gazed they were together in a great cavern" (*An Unofficial Rose* 126).

The corrupting aspect of their romantic alliance is conveyed by Murdoch through the description of Lindsay which focuses on the reversal of values she epitomizes: "She was a demon, but an angel to him, heartless, but warm for him, a natural tyrant, but for him a liberator, evil, but for him good" (*An Unofficial Rose* 61). The endorsement of the imagery seems to signal Randall's mental lapse into indifference to ordinary morality and his readiness to become an accomplice in the forbidden, and thus exciting, crime. Randall's "trance-like pursuit of the golden grail" (*An Unofficial Rose* 170) and subsequent romantic affair is presented as the source of selfish pleasure that leads to a series of hurtful actions towards his family. The effort to win Lindsay's heart and Randall's quest is compared by the narrator of the novel to "the mystic who pursues the great Other only to find at the last that there is only Himself" (*An Unofficial Rose* 170). To be with Lindsay and to fulfil his desires Randall decides to leave his wife and his daughter. He even asks his father Hugh Peronett to sell a beloved and valuable painting, so he can finance his romantic escapade, the act which reveals that he is willing to sacrifice everything and everyone, misguided as he is by the concept of romantic love provided by the literary tradition of chivalric romance. The process of falling in love imagined as overcoming some supernatural obstacles, misrepresents the idea of attending to the Other properly, which for Murdoch is crucial for intellectual and moral ascent.

Murdoch's depiction of Randall's actions as directly related to the tradition of chivalric romance can be explained with reference to her remarks in *Metaphysics and Mystics*. In this essay Murdoch observes that Shakespeare never used Arthurian legends in his works because

they present a picture of the world which appeals to our pleasure-ridden Ego: "Shakespeare was not interested in this sexy type of literature" ("Metaphysics and Mystics" 181). This denunciation of the Arthurian tradition by Shakespeare, which the author seems to embrace, may help to explain her own reservations concerning the genre evident in its use to depict the state of *eikasia*. Moreover, the tradition of courtly love is evoked in Murdoch's novels as an inspiration leading to an over-idealization of reality. In Murdoch's fiction young boys as well as old men are presented as relying on this convention to escape from the ordinary and disappointing world they live in. Leo Peshkov, in *The Time of the Angels*, states that he wants "to play knights and ladies" and "be a cavalier and do the tasks" (*The Time of the Angels* 65). Leo, who in the past most probably impregnated a girl and escaped his responsibility, is now shown to invoke the tradition of courtly love as a culturally influential defence for the sexual liberalism and immoral debauchery of his time. Even though his own conduct does not conform to the artificial standards imposed by the genre, he readily embraces it, claiming, "Girls are too easy these days. I want to find a girl that's hard, protected by her family, a girl that's hidden in a country house, a girl one isn't allowed to see, kept behind screens and curtains and locked doors" (*The Time of the Angels* 64). Moreover, analysis of Murdoch's texts shows that the courtly romance genre plays an important role in influencing the actions of the characters who decide to rely on it. It may be deduced that their behaviour is directly prompted by the standards created by the tradition of courtly love.

Assuming that for Murdoch a link between the content of the cultural heritage invading the consciousness and the ensuing actions is undeniable, one may claim that any aberrations and problems in her characters' relationships stem directly from their unconscious reliance on antiquated models evoked along with certain cultural traditions. Various texts or even whole genres in Murdoch's depiction are not only the pool of ideas which we use to construct our identity or to fantasise about other people. Culture is used a source of knowledge about relations within society. Take, for instance, the social construct of a gentleman which is subjected to scrutiny in Murdoch's fiction. Preserved in literature, this particular cultural construct may be used here as the source of inspiration and justification for a particular mode of treatment of women as described by Murdoch.

This phenomenon may be illustrated by discussion of Murdoch's portrayal of the relationship between Emily McHugh and Blaise Gavender in *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*. Blaise Gavender engages in an extramarital affair with his student, Emily. As a result, Blaise lives a double life as Emily's lover and Harriet's husband. He meets Emily in a

shabby apartment whilst he enjoys a 'normal' family life in a comfortable home run by his lovely wife. Compared to the highly idealized image of his venerable wife, Emily figures in his imagination as the opposite. His words of endearment are full of imagery pertaining to cultural representations of mistresses: "My Berlin prostitute, my little blackamoor princess", "glinting jewel, jack of diamonds, Queen of the Night" (*The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* 95). This vocabulary, evoked to celebrate their romantic liaison and used to inflame their passion, also becomes an obstacle for achieving happiness in real life. Therefore, realising that she will not be taken seriously while these cultural illusions remain present in Blaise's outlook, Emily insists on dispersing the imagery with which he associates her. Emily announces: "I want to be Queen of the Day for a change" (*The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* 95).

The link between Blaise's immersion in fantasies and the harm done to Emily is undeniable here. Emily's poor living conditions and deteriorating mental health may serve as examples of the very palpable consequences of Blaise's misjudgement. Emily, accusing him of negligence, states, "You've killed me and sent me to hell, and you must descend to the underworld to find me and make me live again. If you don't come for me, I will become a demon and drag you down into the dark" (*The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* 96). Pondering upon the choices he has made, Blaise realizes that his decisions have been influenced by the long conceptual tradition of adultery which is still present in the communal imagination:

Men in other ages and societies had been able to have two or many more women whom they kept incarcerated in separate places and visited when they felt in the mood. An elderly less-loved wife could be retained as an amiable companion, or simply out of pity, and should feel no resentment at that. A man, any man, surely needed various women, there were so many possibilities and styles of love and affection and habit. (*The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* 80)

These ideas circulating in culture are shown to invoke double standards and encourage inappropriate, selfish behaviour. In "Imperial Heroes for a Post-Imperial Age" Jeffrey Richards sets the notion of the gentleman within a broader context and points out towards the origins of the concept: "For over century the idea of chivalry had been embodied in the notion of the gentleman" (138). According to Richards the figure of the officer and gentleman hero eclipsed during the 1960s, but, as Murdoch implies, the idea of a gentleman, which relies on the dichotomy between flesh and spirit, and which has been cultivated in British society for so long, is depicted as recurring in male fantasies, despite its official demise.

Not only the cultural construct of a gentleman, but also that of a maid is used in Murdoch's fiction to show that treatment of people may be negatively affected by notions derived from literature. This problem is discussed in *A Word Child*. In this novel a maid, a lady and the lady's pursuer are ascribed roles influenced by the protagonist's limited understanding of some cultural constructs. The attitude of Hilary Burde, who gets involved with Lady Kitty Jopling and her maid Biscuit, is dictated by his knowledge of the social and cultural code. Biscuit entertains Hilary's fantasy of "a persecuted maid" (*A Word Child* 154). He does not hesitate to steal her kiss because her occupation brings him to the automatic assumption that he is her superior. Lady Kitty, on the other hand, is highly valued and treated with reverence. Hilary ascribes special importance to her words despite the fact that, in reality, she is "a silly romantic female who likes involving men in little mysterious plots" (*A Word Child* 279). Hilary's lack of resistance to socio-cultural conditioning is depicted as affecting his relationships with these two women. Hilary, along with other Murdochian characters, is deeply influenced by the cultural material to which he is exposed. His shallow romanticism, evident in his sentimental evoking of class distinctions, is depicted by Murdoch as connected to his aesthetic interests. Hilary has a predilection for Miniatures portraying a princess on a terrace watching a thunderstorm, a prince leaving his mistress by moonlight, two girls of transcendent beauty striding through a garden, a girl rather like Biscuit braiding her hair (*A Word Child* 378). Moreover, to describe the nature of his relationship with Lady Kitty, Hilary refers to James Elroy Flecker's *Hassan*, a drama about poor lovers who have to make a difficult choice. Conradi discusses the range of allusions in *A Word Child*, *Time of the Angels*, *The Italian Girl* and *The Unicorn*, and concludes that, "Romantic composers and thinkers are made fun of because Romanticism, in the form of an apocalyptic yearning for redemption, is the subject-matter of these more speculative novels" (*The Saint and the Artist* 154).

The same problem of mindlessly evoking anachronistic social structures is portrayed in another of Murdoch's novels, *Bruno's Dream*. Danby Odell, another example of a character immersed in fantasy, engages in an affair with Adelaide de Crecy, his housekeeper. Adelaide, who adores Danby, opposes the outdated label of housekeeper, thinking that by employing the outmoded social labels Danby "turned her into a joke as he turned almost everything into a joke" (*Bruno's Dream* 45). Once he told her that she has "the surname of a famous tart in a story" (*Bruno's Dream* 45). Danby is referring to Odette de Crecy, a character in Marcel Proust's novel, *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu*. The intertextual link pinpoints the illusory

nature of human relationships. In the volume entitled *Swann's Way*, the love story of Charles Swann and Odette is told. Blinded by his love, Swann cannot see that Odette is a coquette, it takes him a long time to ask for her hand and by the time she submits he does not love her anymore. Ironically, the de Crecy character in Murdoch's story is also misrepresented, but, instead of being idealized, she is debased by Danby's associations with Proust's fictional character.

Class-crossing romantic adventures in Murdoch's novels demonstrate that a person who is reduced to artificial ideas derived from his cultural heritage is devoid of true judgement and lacks proper evaluation of a relationship, which leads to adoption of double standards. These standards, as Murdoch points out, silently pervade the culture, ready to be reused at any time. Even though they are officially rejected or marginalized they still exercise a strong influence, because they remain fossilized in ever appealing and fascinating works of art.

The selection of examples discussed so far shows that Murdoch pays particular attention to the discrepancy between the inner and outer spheres, the tension between a character's interior life of the mind and his actions. Analysis of her novels proves that the outlook of a character and the content of his or her inner life are tightly interconnected. Due to the fact that the meaningful use of literary allusions provokes reflection on the dynamics of the inner life and the outer decisions of an individual, a moral act in Murdoch's artistic representation consists not only of the action itself, but of the importance of the mental processes preceding it, especially the process of re-contextualising and re-appropriating for personal purposes the conventional imagery transmitted by art which circulates in the cultural heritage.

The complicated relationship between individual consciousness and the outside world, which is her sphere of moral inquiry, is depicted in Murdoch's novels as being conditioned by characters' cultural memory. In Murdoch's depiction of her characters' love lives, genres and literary traditions become sources of aesthetic inspiration for their personal narratives. Murdoch's portrayal of questing knights shows that with the evocation of the genre of chivalry some social structures and models of behaviour are brought to a character's attention and often migrate to his consciousness, which may negatively affect his subsequent actions. Analysis of the portrayal of such characters as Randall or Danby reveals that the potential experience of knowing the other and attending to her/him properly may be degraded into adventure and a source of excitement. Their fantasies are shown to affect their actions, which

echoes Murdoch's description of moral life in her philosophical writings. The reflection and the deed are tightly connected in Murdoch's philosophy.

Whether we investigate the inspiration with the heroic *epos* developed by Homer, the knightly conduct described in chivalric romances, or the Gothic predilection for horror, we notice that Murdoch introduces certain points of convergence between these diverse genres. It is noteworthy that the author seems to call them collectively 'Romantic'. The reason behind this classification is that these different traditions all seem to promote the kind of individualism which leads to excessive self-centrism and which affects negatively the way we perceive the other, thus corrupting our moral life. The hyper-individualization of the modern society is rendered through reference to genres which put emphasis on the role of the hero and contribute to strengthening the privileged position of the concept of an individual as the man of power. The point is summarized aptly in *The Book and the Brotherhood* where Crimond states that the incarnate individual "has withered into a little knot of egoism" (*The Book and the Brotherhood* 175). The features considered by Murdoch as Romantic are summarized by Conradi as "a common voluntarism" and "an overemphasis on the will" (*The Saint and the Artist* 22). Any type of literature which promotes the kind of hero Murdoch calls 'existentialist' is deemed misleading by her. By introducing intertextual allusions referring to many anachronistic and unrealistic models of human interactions, Murdoch shows how our understanding of other people is affected. She seems to imply that we tend to rely on these different traditions to understand our own place within society, as well as our identity, but we rely on them also to simplify the complicated process of building relationships with others. In Murdoch's fiction the concept of the moral deed is depicted as being closely connected to our existence within society, and specifically to the way in which we interact with others. Murdoch signals that our projections, so deeply affected by the fantasy-making tendencies of the Ego, can really affect the public sphere and others around us.

### **III.5 Depiction of the reader's experience in Murdoch's novels**

In this subchapter I will focus on characters' responses towards various texts, predominantly literary works, as depicted in Murdoch's fiction. Different reading experiences and degrees of readers' involvement with texts will be discussed in the light of Plato's ideas pertaining to mimesis. It will be argued that Murdoch advocates close attention to, and good critical skills in interaction with, art. The emphasis on the active role of the reader and the recipient of cultural products will be presented as her counter measure to minimise the negative influence

of art feared by Plato. Murdoch's depiction of the reader's experience, and the reader's response to her own novels, will be discussed with reference to Erini Panagiotidou's cognitive approach to the creation of meaning.

Analysis of Murdoch's characters' literary tastes and the influence that texts exercise on them allows us to distinguish different modes of processing content; different responses to cultural products vary according to the degree of the reader's involvement. The first group of characters to consider consists of old scholars, often teachers, whose reclusive lives revolve solely around studies of old manuscripts. Often classical scholars, they are depicted as engaged in a constant study of ancient texts. Their approach is characterized by dedication and scrupulous analysis of the original text, usually followed by meaningful reflection. Max Lejour in *The Unicorn* and Professor Levquist in *The Book and the Brotherhood* are two notable examples. Max is said to be working on Plato's *Timaeus* and writing his own book on Plato. Levquist is depicted as writing a book on Sophocles. Both show propensity to reflect upon the content of the reading material, which is emphasized in their attempt to produce written response to the source materials. Appreciation of Greek tradition, ancient history and philosophy which both of these fictional scholars show appears to be synonymous for Murdoch with good insight and potential for intellectual growth. Their choice of material to study mirrors their philosophical inclinations, but it also signals certain problems. Preoccupation with texts that stimulate their highly abstract musings may result in intellectual detachment from down-to-earth matters.

Another category of readers that emerges in Murdoch's novels is a group of adolescent boys who go through traumatic experiences which threaten their moral lives. Boys like Donald Mor in *The Sandcastle* and Toby Gashe in *The Bell*, who manage to escape the corrupting influence of people surrounding them, show a predilection for books about machines and buildings. This inclination, possibly a subtle allusion to Plato's interest in mathematics and engineering, seems to be favourably presented by Murdoch, judging by these characters' ability to resist the temptations awaiting them. Shown as occasionally experimenting with models of behaviour derived from popular culture, they are usually capable of breaking its spell, and recognizing the falsifying and illusory nature of the picture it sometimes provides. Their reading selection seems to denote a certain natural immunity to the influence of their cultural heritage, or rather the potential to resist it, because the content of the books they enjoy is certainly not appealing to the Ego.

Compared to these youngsters fed with technical data stimulating their inquisitive minds, Murdoch's characters who are zealous readers of popular fiction are far more susceptible to becoming enticed by the illusory world of literature. Detective stories or romances are usually appreciated by naïve characters like Danby in *Bruno's Dream*, who are usually forced to mature out of reliance on such formulaic plots. Jake in *Under the Net* or Gulliver in *The Book and the Brotherhood* are other examples of hopeless romantics with poor understanding of their surroundings. They are shown blindly and intuitively following the examples provided by the texts they devour. They easily lose themselves in fictional worlds, identify with the protagonists of novels they read and emulate their systems of value. The most extreme case of immersion in the world of cheap drama, pleasure and pain, is reliance on the commercial pulp fiction in magazines for girls. Take, for instance, Murdoch's depiction of Miranda in *An Unofficial Rose*, a manipulative and egoistic teenager, whose actions seem to be the consequences of her unsophisticated reading preferences which dull her empathy and understanding.

The depiction of Leo in *The Time of the Angels*, who belongs to this group of misled Romantic readers, reminds us that reading is a form of moral education, not only in the content of texts, but also in that the reader's response towards them may influence the way he acts later on. Leo is an example of a misguided 'aesthetic type' of character who, in spite of being well-read, proudly proclaims his lack of morals. Leo proudly describes himself as "a lone wolf, a bit like what's-his-name, that chap in Dostoyevsky", and he adds that his goal is to "train myself in immorality, really get those old conventions out of my system" (*The Time of the Angels* 65). The fact that he is well-educated and familiar with canonical texts turns him into a person deluded by a sense of intellectual grandeur. However, his good knowledge of literature accompanied by this kind of moral ignorance denotes that Leo has a very superficial understanding of these texts. The illusion of being a supreme sort of human being, aesthetically orientated and culturally competent, pushes him into the direction of moral relativism. He is purposefully oblivious to the interconnection of art and morality, thus representing the antithesis of Murdoch's claim that, through beauty, art leads us in the direction of good. Charles Arrowby in *The Sea, the Sea* or Bradley Pearson in *The Black Prince* may serve as two other representatives of characters holding a Romantic outlook who value the aesthetic side of art more highly than its moral message.

The problem of the response towards art, which is shown to leave deep impressions on the character's consciousness, as presented in Murdoch's novels, is closely connected with



Plato's treatment of poetry. In Plato's dialogues the value of poetry is severely criticised on account of the poets' lack of competence. They are unable consciously to evaluate the content of their work and aspire to public acclaim which makes them untrustworthy as providers of meaning. The most famous passages illustrating Plato's concerns with the influence of art can be found in the second and tenth books of *The Republic*. In book II Socrates directs his critique towards the greatest poets and literary authorities like Hesiod and Homer, claiming that their works are fanciful and unrealistic representations of reality:

Then, although we are admirers of Homer, we do not admire the lying dream which Zeus sends to Agamemnon [...] These are the kind of sentiments about the gods which will arouse our anger; and he who utters them should be refused a chorus; neither shall we allow teachers to make use of them in the instruction of the young, meaning, as we do, that our guardians should be true worshippers of the gods and like them. (*The Republic* 55)

In book X of *The Republic* Homer's role as the educator of Greece is questioned in a more detailed way. Along with other poets, he is presented as an imitator of phantoms of virtue, not worth the title of the educator of Hellas. It is stated that his works contain not just falsehoods, but falsehoods held up as models of good behaviour. Therefore, the works of poets, who acquiesce to this kind of representation of reality, are considered as threatening the education of the young:

Whenever you meet with any of the eulogists of Homer declaring that he has been the educator of Hellas, and that he is profitable for education and for the ordering of human things, and that you should take him up again and get to know him and regulate your whole life according to him, we may love and honour those who say these things –they are excellent people, as far as their lights extend; and we are ready to acknowledge that Homer is the greatest of poets and first of tragedy writers; but we must remain firm in our conviction that hymns to the gods and praises of famous men are the only poetry which ought to be admitted into our State. For if you go beyond this and allow the honeyed muse to enter, either in epic or lyric verse, not law and the reason of mankind, which by common consent have ever been deemed best, but pleasure and pain will be the rulers in our State. (*The Republic* 264)

Plato's rejection and disapproval of poetry is selective. As illustrated by the fragment above, Plato's suspiciousness targets the content inspired by 'the honeyed muse'. Responsible for guiding poets towards the realm of 'pleasure' and 'pain', the honeyed muse is the embodiment of art appealing to basic instincts, to the Ego, which therefore diverges from the intellectual aspirations of the philosopher.

Plato's treatment of poetry has elicited a vast amount of discussion and criticism over the centuries. Within many voices contributing to the debate, I think that the contribution of Gabriel Richardson Lear deserves especially close attention. In *Mimesis and Psychological Change in 'Republic III'*, she argues that Plato's unfavourable opinion of certain types of art was dictated by his understanding of mimesis. According to Lear, Plato thought that mimesis is inscribed in the encounter with poetry, or, in other words, is the side effect of interacting with it. Creating poetry, performing it, or being exposed to it as a listener, involves the psychological assimilation of the agent to the characters he imitates. Lear observes that "the performer, as part of the activity of imitation, imagines what is it like to be his character and attempts to inhabit (in imagination) his character's point of view. As a result Homer and the tragic poets take the perspective of the characters they describe" (Lear 197). Consequently, according to Lear, in Plato's understanding poetry is viewed as necessarily inviting mimesis. Both, the poet taking the perspective of the characters he introduces, and the reader taking the perspective of a character to understand the poet's vision, enter in 'a relationship' which may have the potential for endangering and corrupting the moral life of an individual.<sup>77</sup> Lear concludes that this interpretation of mimesis has, in turn, led scholars like Stephen Halliwell (2002), Giovanni Ferrari (1990, chapter 2) and Penelope Murray (1996) "to view Plato's theory of moral-poetic education as a matter of practicing not only the gestures and tones of voice of an Achilles or Odysseus, but also their emotions and, more broadly, their inner life" (Lear 197).

A.E. Taylor, author of *Plato: the Man and his Work*, expresses a similar conviction pertaining to the nature of Plato's treatment of poetry. In the passage discussing Plato's attitude towards poets, which was underlined by Murdoch in her copy of the book, we read:

It is not the floridity of Timotheus or Agathon which is the object of attack, but the art of the Periclean age. We are only throwing dust in our own eyes if we suppose that Socrates wants merely to repress the cheap music-hall and the garish melodrama, or the equivalents of freak movements like *Dada*. He is seriously proposing to censure just what we consider the imperishable contributions of Athens to the art and literature of the world, because he holds that their tendencies are unfavourable to the highest development of moral personality. (Taylor 279, Murdoch's emphasis)

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<sup>77</sup> In *The Republic* Plato contrasts mimesis with *diegesis*. *Diegesis*, as opposed to mimesis, is concerned with the telling of the story by a narrator. The narrator, invisible or even the all-knowing, usually speaks from 'outside', in the form of commenting on the action or the characters.

In Taylor's interpretation, art is the subject of Plato's criticism because it may negatively affect moral life.

In Murdoch's fiction mimicry, understood as a process of copying which requires psychological involvement, is something that characterizes mostly the group of readers fascinated by different ideas derived from their cultural heritage and implementing them in a real life. Naïfs and Romantics who are eager to re-enact familiar roles may represent the consequences of excessive involvement with the text feared by Plato. Murdoch's depiction of their responses to various types of texts illustrates the undeniable magnetic appeal of art.

Murdoch's artistic vision resulting in the portrayal of characters deeply influenced by Gothic novels or chivalric romances not only seems evocative of Plato's concerns, but also links Murdoch to more current approaches to human psyche, displayed for instance by Norman Holland. Holland's understanding of the act of reading emphasizes its involving character: "We go into a trance-like state. We become "absorbed". [...] We accept all kinds of improbabilities in science-fiction, fantasy, beast fables, Arthurian romances, epic poems, and so on because we no longer test the reality of what we are reading and seeing" (Holland N.3). In his neuroscientific approach to literature Holland explains that whilst we are involved with a narrative our brain functions differently from the way that it does in ordinary life. The difference in functioning results from the assumption that as readers we instinctively assume that we are not going to act on the work of art. Holland claims that we can sense that crucial difference between fiction and reality (3).

The state of being absorbed and entranced as described by Holland, seems in Murdoch's portrayal to be easily prolonged by the workings of the unconscious, which duplicates the patterns provided by the original text and projects them on their surroundings. Her novels suggest that an encounter with fiction is a mind-altering process which leaves some permanent traces and imprints on our mental framework, whether we are aware of it or not. Furthermore, as Holland points out, "when we respond to a literary work we are cycling through well-nigh instantaneous circuits of expectation, form-and-defence, content as schemas and fantasy, and finally a closure or 'making sense' that gratifies the original expectation" (240).<sup>78</sup> Relying on Jaak Panksepp's research Holland established that "such

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<sup>78</sup>This cycling system presented by Holland is, as the author testifies, inspired by Panksepp's studies in the tension between consummatory and appetitive phases of behaviour generated by the feeling of pleasure. See Jaak Panksepp, *Affective Neuroscience: The Foundations of Human and Animal Emotions* (Oxford University Press, 1998).

cyclic urges to reach out and seek rewards constitute the basic adaptive function of the underlying [self-stimulation circuits]” (quoted in Holland N. 240).

Murdoch’s picture of human consciousness as so easily yielding to the grasp of addictive fantasy may be viewed in terms of displaying these consummatory tendencies. The natural tendency to seek gratification from the fulfilment of our expectations is evident in her characters’ behaviour and choices, not only while reading but, more importantly, while enacting the familiar plots in real life. The characters immersed in their own fantasies, so deeply influenced by cultural products, may be interpreted as inscribing others into their scenarios to satisfy the expectations created by the formulaic nature of their fantasies. Murdoch’s artistic illustration of the phenomenon reveals the depth and accuracy of her understanding of the mechanisms governing our human nature. Walker Gibson, another eminent figure in the field, also points out that the psychological involvement, which Murdoch so skilfully depicts, is inevitable during the encounter with a text. He states that “every time we open the pages of another piece of writing, we are embarked on a new adventure in which we become a new person. We assume, for the sake of the experience, that set of attitudes and qualities which the language asks us to assume, and, if we cannot assume them, we throw the book away” (Gibson W. 156). A similar observation, which again confirms the accuracy of Murdoch’ portrayal, was made by Georges Poulet, another prominent figure in the field, who characterizes the experience of reading as “the strange invasion of my person by the thoughts of another, I am a self who is granted the experience of thinking thoughts foreign to him” (44). Analysis of Murdoch’s fiction shows that interaction with art is not a consequence-free activity. It is a mind-altering process, especially when the content of art appeals to our natural selfish desires.

Her portrayal of characters who show signs of being affected by works of art, influenced by the content they ‘digest’, challenges the assumption that human beings are always capable of rationally distancing themselves from the cultural products they are exposed to. Instead of embracing the conviction that an objective evaluation is our natural reaction towards art, Murdoch seems to argue that we accumulate the material deep in the recesses of our consciousness and evoke it instinctively in the time of need. Copying and emulating, evocative of Plato’s mimesis, seems to be the natural *modus operandi* of humans, according to Murdoch. The phenomenon which Murdoch describes has been captured by Jerome Bruner, an eminent cognitivist who claims that we tend to model personal narratives on the narrative models made available in a given culture. According to Bruner, the tool kit of any

culture is “replete with a stock of canonical life narratives (heroes, Marthas, tricksters, etc.) and combinable formal constituents from which its members can construct their own life narratives: canonical stances and circumstances” (4). Unconscious mimicry may be treated as a natural, but sometimes destructive, process. The depiction of various responses towards texts in Murdoch’s novels shows that mimicry may amount to excessive self-indulgence and lead to a disregard of reality.

This behaviour governed by thoughtless emulation is juxtaposed against more critical or distanced approaches towards textual content. The characters of assiduous scholars who analyse and study texts are far from mindlessly copying. The difference between them and the previous group of characters lies in their conscious effort to overcome this natural propensity. Moreover, as the analysis of Murdoch’s novels shows, this intellectual distance achieved by years of study is not only the privilege of intellectuals but can be achieved by anybody who declines the urge to embrace the ideology of the text without properly examining it. The depiction of the reader’s response exemplified by Pattie in *The Time of the Angels* illustrates the importance of intellectual detachment, especially while experiencing fictional worlds.

Pattie is said to be a self-educated person. She reads a lot of romantic novels, including some she has been taught to call classics, and women’s magazines from cover to cover, and she even reads some poetry, copying pieces of it into a black notebook. Her literary preferences show that Pattie is exposed to potentially mesmerising and influential textual content. However, what is particularly distinctive about her ‘education’ is the fact that she never hopes to find in the texts any permanent truths or role models. The narrator of *The Time of the Angels* states that, luckily for her:

The world of art remained fragmented for her, a shifting kaleidoscopic pattern which yielded beauty almost without form. She amassed small pieces of poems, of melodies, faces in the pictures, laughing Cavaliers and Blue Boys, scarcely identified, happily recognized, and easily forgotten. She took no concepts away from her experiences. (*The Time of Angels* 26)

Although Pattie lives on an intellectually impoverishing diet, the advantage she holds over many of Murdoch’s characters lies in her natural resistance to universalizing ‘concepts’ conveyed by the texts she reads. Compared to Pattie, for whom the world of art is ‘fragmented’, intelligent individuals, well-read and sophisticated, tend to be swayed more easily by the philosophical (Carel in *The Time of the Angels*, Rozanov in *The Philosopher’s Pupil* and Rupert Foster in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*) or by literary works (Charles in *The*

*Sea, the Sea*, Bradley in *The Black Prince*). Even though they usually have a better grasp of a text's ideology or a better insight into an author's intentions, eventually they are more susceptible for the working of the Ego's to fall more easily into the traps of the unconscious, because they are unable to resist the allure of a ready-made answer served in a form of a complete idea or concept.

Murdoch's distinction between different types of readers and different responses to texts, both fictional and non-fictional, corresponds to the claims made by Natalie Phillips. Phillips distinguishes between pleasure reading and reading for study and observes that those different forms of engagement with a text have different effects on the brain. Pleasure reading increases the blood flow to different areas of the brain which leads to experiencing some sort of elation. The elation experienced while reading and enacting a good romance or detective story explains the lasting appeal of certain genres.<sup>79</sup> Close literary reading, on the other hand, focusing on the form and other aspects of literary work, involves multiple complex cognitive functions, and may be viewed as an effective brain exercise. Phillips argues that: "It's not only what we read, but thinking rigorously *about* it that's of value" (quoted in Goldman 2012).<sup>80</sup>

The example of Pattie, along with other examples of readers' experiences in Murdoch's fiction, draws our attention to the importance of the reader's role in the creation of meaning. The active role of the recipient in the process of interacting with culture has been an object of inquiry for many scholars involved in research on the experience of narrative worlds. Norman Holland (2009), Wolfgang Iser (1978) and Stanley Fish (1980) use the metaphor of performance for reading, on account of the reader's contribution. Richard Gerrig draws attention to the fact that: "[readers] must use their own experiences of the world to bridge gaps in texts. They must bring both facts and emotions to bear on the construction of the world of the text. And, just like actors performing roles, they must give substance" (17). Apart from the process of bridging the gaps, Gerrig is convinced that while reading, certain mental activities take place which enable readers to "reduce [their] own reality" and achieve

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<sup>79</sup> Pinker states that: "Hollywood romances and adventures are the art forms that appeal to basic human tastes- they engage a universal human aesthetic" (Pinker 410).

<sup>80</sup> The results of the research conducted by Zwann prove the notion that readers allocate their processing resources according to their expectations about the genre of a text. See Rolf Zwaan. "Effect of Genre Expectations on Text Comprehension." *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition*, 20.4 (Jul 1994), pp. 920-933.

the state in which we can inhabit the real and narrative worlds as a real and fictional character (Gerrig 22).

To describe the phenomenon of the reader's experience in Murdoch's novels a model proposed by Maria-Erini Panagiotidou may be informative. In her PhD thesis *Intertextuality and Literary Reading: a Cognitive Approach* Panagiotidou places emphasis on the effort of the reader and his or her active participation in the creation of meaning, and proposes a cognitive approach to intertextuality. Although the notion of relationships between various texts has been discussed by many scholars like Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes or Gerard Genette, the author of that thesis employs recent developments in the field of cognitive linguistics and cognitive psychology to persuade us in a cogent manner that none of the theoreticians mentioned above managed to explain thoroughly the role of the reader in the process. Panagiotidou's thesis endorses the 'entity' of the reader and endows it with crucial importance in the literary experience, which is the approach I seek to apply for the purpose not only of studying Murdoch's depiction of the influence some texts may have, but also of elaborating on the experience of interacting with her narratives from the perspective of her reader.

The main objective of Panagiotidou is to examine how readers create meaningful interconnections between literary works within a text. Panagiotidou thinks that intertextuality is a cognitive process rather than just a property of the text. According to her thesis "words are points of access to vast repositories of structured knowledge, and their meaning is always understood in terms of these repositories and the context of use. The encyclopaedic knowledge of individuals is grounded on the range of their physical, social and cultural experiences" (Panagiotidou 32). She proposes that readers create intertextual links by combining their background knowledge with textual elements in so called intertextual frames. A frame is built "where information from the text is combined with intertextual knowledge" (Panagiotidou 77). Panagiotidou distinguishes three types of frames, classifying the connections that may be made by the reader as semantic, topical and stylistic. A particularly important aspect of her approach towards intertextuality is the significance of individual experiences and competencies. She claims that "[t]he text-specific information triggers and gives rise to information not included in the text but stored in the individual's mind" (Panagiotidou 79-80). She emphasises that the reader's readiness to create associations between texts can be easily prompted by different elements of the text, but is usually largely conditioned by the individual competencies of the reader.

Intertextual knowledge is of a highly idiosyncratic nature due to the fact that it builds on each individual's pre-existing reading experience. It is more difficult to account for this type of experience, as it is far more specialised than general knowledge and depends primarily on the individual, his/her educational level, personal preferences and whether or not he or she has received any kind of formal training. (Panagiotidou 84)

This model of intertextual frames may be helpful to describe the process of the activation of cultural knowledge that Murdoch's characters undergo. As has been discussed, those characters who rely on fantasy tend to derive inspiration from various cultural products, often texts. I think that Murdoch's depiction of consciousness exposed to the influence of a literary work resembles the process described by Panagiotidou. Characters, who strive to understand the surrounding reality and are susceptible to the influence of art, respond to various occurrences in a manner resembling the cognitive processes of linking two texts. One's life can may be treated as a personal narrative, the story we continue to tell every day, and the temptation to link and compare it with other narratives is great, as described by Murdoch. Murdoch's description of reader-responses shows that we create associations very quickly and that this ability, this cognitive process, is almost universal. We are very prone to having our reactions triggered by incidents and events, and to interpret them through the prism of our cultural knowledge, establishing a link between our own situation and the familiar text. Take for instance Danby's treatment of Adelaide de Crecy. Prompted by her surname, he immediately establishes an association between her and the heroine in Proust's novel. Many elements in ordinary life may predispose us to establish associations between our story and a given literary work or character and encourage us to interpret events, in a way similar to the creation of meaning while reading.

In Murdoch's understanding and consequently in her depiction, the experience of reading leaves permanent traces in our memory, which later on may be unconsciously retrieved while constructing fantasies. The use of poetic language or certain imagery may evoke an outdated social structure fossilized in the tradition. The migration of tropes and their subsequent incorporation for the needs of fantasy is the process which, according to Murdoch, influences the way we attend to reality. Taking into consideration that interpretation is a complex process in which not only aesthetic categories are evoked but also socio-cultural norms and forms of knowledge, Murdoch seems to warn us that the content of texts must be critically evaluated before being incorporated into our personal narratives.



Apart from elucidating the reader's experiences and the way that their subsequent behaviour is conditioned by works of art, I think that the methodology proposed by Panagiotidou can be used to describe the experience of reading Murdoch's own novels. Murdoch's readers, necessarily presented with texts so openly playing with various literary traditions, are almost immediately subjected to this cognitive task of responding to familiar images and themes, which test their reader's competence. Murdoch's narrative strategy of employing intertextuality as well as her skilful use of imagery, forces readers to dig deeper in their repertoires of textual knowledge to discover the meaning intended by the author. Murdoch leaves her readers with many lexical items to which they automatically respond such as the image of a rose, a reference to a specific book or author, or the use of a genre, which all create certain expectations, the destruction of which seems to be a part of her cunning narrative strategy. Murdoch seems to show that not only characters are predisposed to interpret their lives as echoing the familiar stories. We, her readers, are as easily misguided as the characters we survey from a seemingly safe distance. Our interpretation, based on idiosyncratic knowledge which reflects our education and cultural background, is a complex cognitive process of combining the old and familiar with the new and unknown. Murdoch, in her game with the literary tradition invites us to challenge and to learn to resist the old habit of building expectations on the basis of previous experiences. Murdoch seems to encourage active defiance of the old mimetic urge and forces us to treat every case, every instance, as requiring our attention separately and individually. She encourages us to resist the natural temptation to take the easy way out, to rely on the old models, and instead she wants us to stay critically vigilant and open-minded towards reality.

Analysis of Murdoch's novels shows that the experience of reading, in Murdoch's understanding, is a two-way communication process. Literature ceases to be a form of pure entertainment, or an object of aesthetic inquiry, because every 'encounter' with culture subsequently reverberates in our personal narratives and in our actions. Additionally, Murdoch's active engagement in dialogue with the literary canon forces us to form our own judgements on the texts that shape our outlook. She appears to be preoccupied with the evaluation of her own cultural heritage and with redefining for us the role of literature in our intellectual development. Murdoch thus imbues literature with real importance as a source of formative influence.

Murdoch's argument that literary preferences and the degree of our involvement with texts may directly affect our actions might seem painfully naïve, obvious or even irrelevant.

Steven Pinker, one of the most influential experimental psychologists and cognitive scientists, argues in his best-selling book, *The Blank Slate*, that “there are no obvious moral consequences to how people entertain themselves in their leisure time. The conviction that artists and connoisseurs are morally advanced is a cognitive illusion” (Pinker 415). Pinker claims that we can provide numerous examples of Nazi sociopaths who loved Mahler and had a huge appreciation for art, yet displayed a complete lack of humanity. Although Pinker’s observations seem absolutely convincing, Murdoch’s musings open the possibility of a loophole in his scientific approach towards art. Her fiction, containing a deep reflection on our relation to cultural products, establishes a significant distinction in our responses to art. Murdoch’s presentation of the problem makes us conclude that art’s influence lies not only with its content. Contrary to the generalizing outlook of Pinker, Murdoch opts for a more individualized approach to art, in which individual response and individual critical abilities matter.

The depiction of reader-response in Murdoch’s novels suggests a need for an evaluation of art and cultural products. A careful study of texts resulting in valuable reflection, or an occupation with non-literary texts like grammar books that help to divert the attention from the Ego, are practices which Murdoch favours and which stand in direct opposition to the mindless copying of popular plots and models. Murdoch’s depiction of her characters seems to convey the message that a more careful selection of study material is called for, which again brings us to Plato and his expectations concerning the recipients of his message. I think that Plato’s philosophy, especially his theory of Forms, which introduces some rather undefinable ideals, is a system which is inherently oriented toward activating the moral awareness of the individual. The contrast between reality experienced through the senses and the higher reality experienced through reasoning calls for a constant search of the latter. Plato seems to know that the instinct to copy and mimic lies at the core of our nature and he uses the concept to promote individual reflection, to conceptualize the ideal, to discover it through cautious analysis. In her analysis of the reader’s active role in the creation of meaning, Murdoch also promotes the need to imaginatively engage with reality.

In the time of a great postmodern shift from epistemic certainty to ontological doubt Murdoch reveals in her novels a complete deposition of reason by the forces of the unconscious. Fantasy prevails over imaginative efforts to understand others and the world.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> The concept of a true and loving perception of another individual is discussed by Iris Murdoch in “The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts”.

Instead of properly attending to the uniqueness of experience, we display a tendency to rely on holistic explanations offered by various texts circling in the common culture as well as on our personal scenarios propelled by fantasy. According to Murdoch, what we produce on a regular basis seems to be a strange amalgam of our hidden desires, illusions, and patterns derived from the various cultural products with which we are in contact.

Similarly to Plato's slaves, Murdoch characters are shown as being trapped in their own fantasies inspired by various cultural products. The reader of Murdoch's fiction quickly realizes that not only Murdoch's characters are trapped inside the net of allusions and associations. The reader is also trapped in the eclectic mixture of literary allusions and conventions introduced by the author. In order to interpret, the reader must necessarily to confront the nuances of Murdoch's writing style, which involves juggling with genres and literary conventions. The whole process of evoking associations and spawning fantasies which is experienced by the characters seems to be reflected in the reader's constant search for meaning in Murdoch's novels bursting with intertextual references and hidden commentaries. The two often interconnected forms of entrapment provoke a deep reflection on the nature of our interaction with cultural heritage.

Cognitive scientists agree that we learn through imitation and through observing others. Steven Pinker states that our ability to learn depends on the ability to look into the mind of the person being imitated which is called intuitive psychology: "A mind unequipped to discern other people's beliefs and intentions, even if it can learn in other ways, is incapable of the kind of learning that perpetuates culture" (62). Cultural learning depends on specialized psychological equipment. Murdoch calls this ability 'attention' and presents the activity as beneficial for the agent because contact with the other is usually needed to break the spell of solipsism. Murdoch therefore calls for a careful analysis of the ideas which preserve particular pictures of human nature in order to raise awareness of their content and of our relation to it, which may often be culturally outdated or appear as a dangerous anachronism.

In his studies of human nature Pinker quotes Murdoch as one of the writers who exemplify a new convergence of explorations of the human condition because she testifies to the existence of a single durable human nature. He quotes this particular passage from Murdoch:

We me make, in many respects though not in all, the same kind of moral judgements as the Greeks did, and we recognize good or decent people in times and literatures remote from our own, Patroclus,

Antigone, Cordelia, Mr. Knightley, Alyosha. [...] And this, when one reflects on it, is a remarkable testimony to the existence of a single durable human nature (quoted in Pinker 418-419)

The recognition is well deserved because fifty years before the development of the cognitive sciences, Murdoch tackled the question of human nature whilst observing the relationship between the work of art and the nature of our preoccupation with it. She notices the tendency to project the work of fiction onto real life and explores the way in which we form our private icons. The important role of myth and storytelling in human life is particularly emphasized in her fiction. Excessive image-making is as negative a phenomenon as the drastic rejection of social models. Myths allow us to heal, through the myths we process our experiences and emotions. Edward Baltram in *The Good Apprentice* or Tamar Hernshaw in *The Book and the Brotherhood*, find consolation through myth during emotionally turbulent times. Conradi claims that when we get rid of too many illusions we may end up shattered. So some illusions may keep us going. The pure ideal of illusionlessness is unattainable. Excessive reliance on myth and other models derived from culture may be viewed as pathological because it requires inscribing reality into the form instead of facing its contingency. Nevertheless, it is natural and inescapable. The artistic efforts of Murdoch seem to suggest that she is attempting to increase the awareness and critical abilities of her readers.

The need to increase critical abilities is an objective particularly valid in this time of a massive information boom. One may say that culture explodes with ideas and notions remaining easily accessible and affordable. Whether we like it or not we are immersed in an influx of information and images, overwhelming and overflowing, striving for our attention and tampering with our perception and cognitive ability to perceive reality. The ability to remain critical and cautious is now needed more than ever and Murdoch's observations seem particularly pertinent in the twenty-first century. We live in a cave, to follow Murdoch's Platonic image, we are not creatures of the sun by nature. As Socrates in Murdoch's dialogue aptly summarizes:

Our home may be elsewhere, but we are condemned to exile, to live here with our fellow exiles. And we have to live with language and with words. [...] It may be that human beings can only achieve a second best. That second best is our best [...] Not everything connects, my dear Plato. We are not gods. What you call the whole truth is only for them. So our truth must include, must *embrace* the idea of the second best, that all our thought will be incomplete and all our art tainted by selfishness. ("Art and Eros" 492)

We are sociable slaves who relish our fantasies and illusions, derived from the stories and myths circulating in our communities. We are not willing to give them up. Murdoch argues that culture provides us with our identity and affects our moral judgment, but this reliance on culture as a source of knowledge may result in the existence of dangerous misconceptions. Plato wanted to protect us from this mechanism, aptly sensing in art the potential to distort truth. For Murdoch, however, his methods to deal with art appear to be too drastic. Murdoch's selective approach towards our culture, the re-reading and revaluation of the texts that create our literary canon, encourages readers to make more careful choices, to judiciously select the texts with which they preoccupy themselves. Cultivating the tradition of critical approach to the cultural heritage exemplified by Plato and continued by many eminent English writers like Jane Austen in *Northanger Abbey*, Murdoch seems to suggest that instead of giving away the cultural heritage and censoring all of our poets and rhapsodes we should focus on developing a critical distance towards them.

## Conclusion

The beginning of the twenty-first century can be considered a time of unprecedented technological progress. Following the invention of the Internet, an avalanche of electronic devices swamped the market allowing us to benefit from the knowledge offered by the World Wide Web. Spreading with stunning speed, devices like smartphones, tablets and laptops have become indispensable tools facilitating our everyday life. Additionally, the constant development of social media, a crucial factor which continues to propel these revolutionary changes, has completely transformed the way we communicate and interact with each other. Never in the history of humankind has communication been so instantaneous and easy, effortlessly crossing the distance between borders and cultures.

The excessive and uncontrolled reliance on digital technology which we have begun to display as a civilization entails certain risks. The staggering multiplicity of alternative realities and fantasy worlds offered by modern technology diverts our attention from the real world. Allowing us to go online and stay connected on a regular basis these devices have become an integral part of our landscape. However, inasmuch as the media are used to communicate, they may also be slowly changing our perception of reality. Transforming communication by removing it onto digital platforms, technology starts to perform the role of mediator in human interactions. Moreover, in spite of the historical progress in the efficiency with which we accumulate and access knowledge, as users we seem to be struck with a steady deterioration of the critical ability necessary to handle responsibly the tools offered by the technological advancement. Information overload and media saturation affect negatively the quality of journalism and cause information to be muddier. The rise of populism and conspiracy theories in a way that did not exist in the past, a crisis in democratic standards, and outbursts of religious extremism may be considered as side effects of the phenomenon and may signal the problems pertaining to the lack of critical thinking which is needed to halt the spate of miscommunication.

The technological revolution that we are currently witnessing leaves modern man with a question of how to attend to reality properly. One possible solution may be a rediscovery of Plato and his philosophical thought. Plato, an exceptionally gifted individual, diagnosed miscommunication as a key challenge that his generation had to face. It is not an exaggeration to say that he was very conscious of the role of communication in the process of accumulating

knowledge. Sustaining the high quality of communication was one of his priorities which shaped his philosophy and became reflected in his dialogues.

Plato assumes that for proper communication to take place, partners in dialogue must display good intentions and be willing to search for the truth. Participants in dialogue should abstain from corrupting language, the instrument used for exchanging ideas and conducting dialectical practice. By corrupting language Plato understands any use of language for the purpose of manipulating the audience. In Plato's dialogues the group accused of this practice are the Sophists. Because they allow the use of lies to achieve one's goals their amoral practices are incessantly criticized by Socrates. This critique of Sophism, which constitutes an important part of Plato's dialogues, may serve as a relevant source of inspiration in the turbulent time of digital revolution.

Challenges pertaining to communication also lie at the very heart of Iris Murdoch's moral psychology conveyed through the medium of her novels. Murdoch's successful literary career spanned the half century between the mid-50s and the mid-90s, during which she continued insightfully to depict the consequences of the socio-political changes she was observing. Living in a time of demythologization, the postmodern intellectual climate which questioned and cast doubt on the majority of theories, dogmas, and indeed grand narratives, Murdoch attempted to construct a model which would guide her contemporaries through the moral and ideological minefield of the second half of the twentieth century. Her criticism of egocentrism, emphasis on the moral responsibility of teachers and authorities, concern with the education of following generations, and finally, her call for a critical evaluation of cultural products, are all constituents of Murdoch's message voiced in her fiction, which seem to be applicable in modern times. The unique combination of her own observations merged with Platonic thought may be considered a valuable reflection on, if not a remedy for, the dilemmas which we are facing.

The purpose of this thesis, tracing the echoes of Plato's philosophical thought in the narrative strategies of Iris Murdoch's fiction, has been to shed further light on the intellectual synergy of these two great minds and to illustrate the relevance of their ideas for contemporary readers. This analysis of over twenty novels and several philosophical essays written by Murdoch allows us to conclude that the presence of Platonic thought in her novels definitely goes beyond the aspects previously discussed by Murdoch critics. Apart from Plato's metaphysics, which constitutes the major influence pointed out by the researchers, the

presence of Plato's philosophical thought, particularly his moral philosophy, has been ascertained in Murdoch's use of imagery, intertextuality, dialogue and characterization. The following paragraphs summarize the main findings of the conducted analysis.

Murdoch seems to play with Plato's multi-layered concept of a prisoner in the Cave of illusions. Many of her novels are entirely constructed around the idea of being locked out, literarily entrapped in rooms or houses and thus figuratively immersed in the world of fantasies. Murdoch creates the images of confining spaces serving as reconstructions of the Platonic Cave within her narratives to comment on the quality of the characters' existence. Households with inhabitants immobilized by their physical or emotional disorder are a permanent element of her novels. Often characterized by the atmosphere of sleepiness, they parallel the intellectual stupor of the prisoners,

Murdoch exploits the image of a personal space filled with objects to represent illusions. The space serves as manifestation of her characters' inner lives. On the surface, the 'caves' in which her characters reside may resemble cosy retreats, carefully crafted burrows shielding them from the concerns of the outside world, but, in fact, they represent a dangerously alluring entrapment, too comfortable to be abandoned.

In Murdoch's fiction the image of the cave, a self-made sanctuary which intoxicates with its lulling atmosphere, is juxtaposed with the image of an ascetic cell and denotes certain valorisation of the latter on the part of Murdoch. Compared with ostentatiously decorated rooms providing shelter from any confrontation with reality, the room of an ascetic, a person actively striving to disperse the illusions produced by the Ego, is usually deprived of excessive adornments and mirrors their engagement with intellectually challenging tasks.

Using a variety of images that allude to the Allegory of the Cave Murdoch encourages readers to interpret her novels in the light of Plato's ideas about the nature of human existence, especially our natural propensity to rely on fantasies. To comment on the condition of her characters entrapped in their caves and unable to understand the surrounding world, Murdoch resorts to introducing images which are meaningfully connected with the Platonic Cave. The image of a bat, fish or an entrapped bird, along with the compelling descriptions of rooms and interiors evocative of the Platonic Cave, is informative about the existence of modern man. The ability to relate to small creatures and to see their distinctness in Murdoch's fiction translates into the character's ability to sympathise with other human beings.



The confinement of the cave is usually juxtaposed in the novels with a refreshing perspective offered by natural landscape. Compared with indoor entrapments signalling immersion in illusion, connection to nature has been interpreted as synonymous with an attempt to drift away from these illusions. Among various images which are antithetic to the confinement of the Cave, special place is given to the image of water which seems to symbolize change. Introduced by Murdoch to describe her characters' quasi-epiphanies, this image signals the passage from one state of consciousness to another and is linked to Plato's model of intellectual and spiritual ascent. Immersion in water serves as the exact opposite of the state of *eikasia*, the immersion in fantasies experienced by the dwellers of the Cave.

This analysis of the imagery in Murdoch's novels has allowed us to develop the argument that Plato's distrust towards senses, especially the sense of sight, is meaningfully present in Murdoch's fiction. The reliance on sensory data, described by Plato as connected to the prisoners' limited understanding of reality, has been traced in Murdoch's reinterpretation of this idea inscribed in her novels. In her portrayal of modern cave dwellers, Murdoch pays a particular attention to depicting the state of *eikasia* through imagery suggesting impaired vision. To render the state of *eikasia*, her characters are portrayed as over-using intoxicating substances which affect their ability to see properly. We have enumerated many characters whose inability to attend to reality is linked with their predilection to drinking. The self-indulgence, the lack of moderation in drinking, in Murdoch's works seems to indicate the state of *eikasia*. The hallucinations and creations of the intoxicated mind seem to serve as equivalents of the distorted and inadequate pictures of reality produced by the Ego. Impaired vision as a symptom of poor judgement and inability to read the situation properly is also signalled through the images of optical devices like glasses or cameras. These devices connote the presence of fragmentary pictures in the characters' consciousness. The same function is performed by reflections in water and in mirrors. These reflections, which, like photographs, capture random and fleeting moments, do not provide any insight into the complexity of situations or into the psyche of other people, so they serve to depict a natural tendency to rely on sensory data without proper scrutiny.

Analysis of the images used by Murdoch to render the state of *eikasia* shows that she is very consistent in her appropriation of the imagery introduced by Plato in the Allegory of the Cave. Because in Murdoch's fiction the process of intellectual and moral maturation is presented as a journey, significant imagery, evocative of the Cave Allegory, is once again used to illustrate the changes that take place along the way. In order to purify their vision and

explore the dark regions of their psyche, Murdoch's characters descend to the underground which represents their willingness to explore the dark recesses of their mind. In doing so, characters in Murdoch's novels confront the illusions of the Ego and realize their own propensity to spin fantasies. Therefore, the theme of descent is connected with the need to learn more about oneself. It represents the process of exploring the unconscious, of checking empirically the authenticity of illusions and may be considered a dangerous, but also decisive, moment in the characters' lives.

In Murdoch's novels the process of discarding false images and achieving a new level of awareness is visualized as physical movement usually directed downwards. The numerous examples involving the exploration of the underworld which have been found in the novels are juxtaposed against the characters' hasty and often failed attempts to reach a new level of awareness by climbing up something, be it a tree or a building.

The pilgrimage from illusion to reality is depicted not only in terms of movement, but also as a gradual alteration of the characters' vision and takes the form of a journey from darkness to light. The characters' transformation which takes place along the way is described by Murdoch through images of the fire and the sun. These images constitute a permanent element of Murdoch's novels and again illustrate the influence of Plato's model of spiritual and intellectual ascent as a likely source of inspiration. The final destination of the pilgrimage, described by Plato as the exploration of the world outside the Cave, is rarely arrived at in Murdoch's fiction. Instead, Murdoch focuses on describing a common and realistic problem which her characters encounter, namely mistaking the light of fire for the actual sun. Murdoch seems to be convinced that the fire, which represents the psyche, wields the power to allure and entrap the pilgrim by imitating the Good.

In her depiction of changes taking place in her characters' outlook, Murdoch preserves the feeling of discomfort accompanying the transformation, which is a crucial element of Plato's representation of the process described in the Allegory. In Murdoch's novels violence and images of violence constitute an essential element of the transformation. The transition from one level of awareness to another is neither a peaceful nor a harmonious process. On the contrary, it is often violently provoked by the characters described here as *agents provocateurs*. It has been argued that in Murdoch's fiction we can distinguish a group of characters who induce changes by violent means and constitute a separate category within Murdoch's splendid assemblage of character types. In her fiction characters who provoke

violent acts often perform a very ambiguous role. This role may be associated with the workings of Eros, the morally-ambivalent energy that is linked to both destruction and love. Bearing a resemblance to Eros, the powerful force capable of inducing changes, these Puck-like characters seem to facilitate the process of self-discovery, helping others to purify their selfish desires.

The thesis argues that Murdoch's reinterpretation of the Platonic imperative to discard false images consists in her comment on our ability to escape from the Cave of illusion. The conclusion which can be drawn from the depiction of mythmaking and theory-building practices in her novels is that any forms of theory-making, similar to illusions and often inaccurate, are better than quasi-enlightened intellectual apathy. The mythmaking practice, in the context of Murdoch's retrieval of Platonic thought, is just a coping mechanism, a very imperfect interpretation of the reality, but also a tangible proof of the effort to understand it. Compared with Plato's unwavering faith in human rational capacities, Murdoch presents in her novels a more realistic approach, acknowledging the limits of reasoning and our capability for dispelling falsity. The ideas, concepts and theories which Murdoch's characters try to build and which are eventually proved to convey an inaccurate picture of reality are valued as active attempts to discover the truth and advance the dialectical debate.

Murdoch's style employing the imagery akin to the Allegory of the Cave is evocative of Plato's educational use of figurative language. Her use of numerous images alluding to Plato's Allegory is discussed as inviting interpretation of her novels in the light of Plato's philosophical ideas. Combined together, the images evoking Platonic thought are presented as provoking readers to engage in a deepened reflection, transcending the frame of the literary work itself, thus performing the role ascribed by Plato to metaphor. Murdoch's artistic choice of implementing this particular type of imagery creates a space for speculation potentially leading to the discovery of more abstract and complex concepts. Her use of imagery is convergent with Plato's didactic use of figurative language, employed in his dialogues to activate the cognitive abilities of Socrates's interlocutors.

The analysis of Murdoch's novels conducted in the second chapter has shown how she reinterprets and utilizes the generic form of dialogue. Like Plato, she is concerned with participants in dialogue, figures of authority capable of exercising good and bad influence. Therefore, we find in her fiction characters of teachers reminding us of Socrates, who lead their pupils in the direction of the Good, as well as teachers like Sophists, who lead their

pupils astray. Both types of characters appear as interlocutors engaged in debates reflecting the most pivotal moral dilemmas of Murdoch's time.

The reincarnated versions of the ancient Sophists are the characters who represent ideas with which Murdoch seems to disagree. They emerge as interlocutors against whom her own message, inscribed in her novels, must find a way to defend itself. In Murdoch's novels the figure of a bad artist, the artist who epitomizes Plato's and her own fear concerning faulty application of artistic skills, resembles an ancient Sophist. In Murdoch's depiction the reincarnations of the ancient Sophist are figures wielding great power derived from their skilful use of language, yet exercising a bad influence on their surroundings. The conviction that bad art may be a form of sophistry is especially evident in Murdoch's portrayal of artistically gifted intradiegetic narrators. Murdoch's awareness of the fact that our internalized speech is a residue of both, truth and falsehood, is mirrored in her narrative strategy. The ensuing verbalized thoughts, exteriorized in the speech of her first-person narrators, are described as filled with self-serving illusions. The Ego, the source of phantasms and illusions, affects negatively our ability to objectively survey information and thus influences our inner discourse. According to Murdoch, the strong influence of the Ego results in the intrusion of falsity into the interior monologue of her characters, which turns into a discourse tinted with personal needs and passions, lacking the clarity of reasoning essential for proper communication to take place.

Embracing some of Freud's claims about the Ego, but at the same time rejecting psychoanalysis as a science capable of explaining the complexity of our inner lives, Murdoch draws a resemblance between psychoanalysts and the ancient Sophists. Careful analysis of characterization in Murdoch's fiction finds the modern Sophists in her portrayal amounting to pseudo-experts, charlatans using language for their own goals. Contemporary Sophists share a destructive reliance on simplified and thus inadequate pictures of experience, taking the form of misleading ideas which, according to Murdoch, need to be critically assessed.

Another key feature of Plato's dialogues that is preserved in Murdoch's dialectical conversations is a carefully planned narrative situation in which the chief speaker is a wise dialectician. In some passages of her novels Murdoch preserves the formal skeleton of the Socratic dialogue, a carefully arranged narrative situation built around a dialogical exchange. In Plato's dialogues, with a few exceptions, the role is performed by Socrates, depicted as a sage conducting question-answer interviews with different types of interlocutors. His

adversaries, often Sophists like Protagoras or Gorgias, are interlocutors whose views he tries to prove wrong. Yet, apart from arguing with the Sophists, Socrates is portrayed as a teacher surrounded by his young followers and passing over his wisdom.

In Murdoch's depiction of educational practices, especially in her portrayal of young boys exposed to corruption like Peter in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* or Meredith in *The Good Apprentice*, Murdoch reminds us of the dynamics between Socrates and his pupils created by Plato. *Laches* and *Charmides* are dialogues that emphasize Socrates's influence on the young men of distinguished families. Boys coming from good and respectable homes are presented in the moment of trouble, right before the corruption takes place. Murdoch continues Plato's tradition by depicting the adventures of adolescents from good families and endangered with moral relativism by emphasizing the influence of wise teachers on their decisions. Similarly to Plato, Murdoch attempts to capture this pre-corruption state and the moment when the alteration in their worldview occurs, possibly in order to dissect the ideas that may propel moral decay.

It has also been established that Murdoch arranges the interactions between her characters with utmost deliberation and caution by ascribing a great significance to the modes and forms of communication. In her novels, the moment of breakthrough, synonymous with an alteration of the character's worldview, is often preceded by a stimulating conversation. Modelled on Plato's conversations with Socrates, these productive exchanges of ideas usually differ considerably from superficial or conventional exchanges of information that scratch the surface of the true meaning of things.

By introducing conversations stylized like Plato's dialogical debates, Murdoch provides readers with a particular type of commentary on the nature of the ideological conflict inscribed in her novels. The composition of these novels, involving the use of dialectical passages inspired by Plato's dialogues, invites a seemingly impartial comparison of ideas and releases Murdoch from the burden of expressing her own judgement more explicitly.

In Murdoch's fiction knowledge is a final product of dialectical exchange, the result of asking questions and deriving answers by both, her characters and her readers. The process of learning is depicted by Murdoch as an individual activity taking place inside the mind, where the relationship with the beautiful and the good is established. However, she emphasizes that the act of discovery requires a stimulus and guidance provided by other human beings, offering a counterbalance for the illusions of the Ego.

Murdoch's use of dialogue is connected with her ideas on art as expressed in her non-fictional writings. Art being a manifestation of the beautiful belongs to the realm of *becoming*, in other words to the metaphysical world. The form of dialogue which is an artful imitation of spontaneous Socratic discourse can bring us closer to this realm. The passages of her novels inspired by Plato's dialogues and modelled on dialogical debates give her prose a distinctly educational, though not didactic, character. The authorial message, although deeply hidden like the object of philosophical inquiry, must be discovered by means of dialectical practice.

In the third and final chapter it has been argued that Murdoch's fiction focuses on the role of cultural heritage in shaping individual attitudes and outlook. Murdoch depicts the ideas derived from cultural heritage as being intermediaries between her characters' consciousness and the surrounding world. The analysis of the role performed by philosophical and literary texts in this process proves that Murdoch establishes a meaningful connection between the actions and the texts the characters find inspiring. Therefore, the need critically to survey cultural products that may impair our perception is also argued to be evident in Murdoch's novels.

Murdoch's narrative strategy of rendering the connection between moral life and cultural products involves the use of various genres and literary allusions. To echo Plato's ideas about poetry as inviting emulation, Murdoch introduces characters who, inspired by various texts, attempt to re-enact the familiar plots in real life. Because the majority of Murdoch's characters undergo intellectual maturation, a passage from the state of *eikasia* to a new state of awareness, Murdoch illustrates the changes taking place by referring to carefully selected literary works.

To describe her characters' consciousness as immersed in fantasy, Murdoch seems to employ allusions to the texts and authors with whom she wants to engage in a debate about human nature. Murdoch furnishes her description of the pilgrimage from illusion to reality with many references inviting a revaluation of the Western literary canon by instigating a comparison of her model with the other influential pictures of human nature circulating in culture.

To evoke the state of *eikasia* Murdoch uses the Gothic. This genre is employed to signal the entrapment of consciousness by various ideas and images. The genre, which originally served as a counterbalance to a confident worldview provided by scientific development, here seems to open the possibility of a return to reality by conscious

embracement of the 'dark forces' it investigates. Another popular literary convention used by Murdoch to render the state of intellectual *eikasia* is the picaresque. Because in the picaresque there is little, if any, character development, the use of this convention expresses Murdoch's scepticism about our ability to change from being self-centred and self-involved heroes, the role in which we are cast by the Ego. Her deployment of the genre, which drives a character to participate in a series of actions and which, instead of progress, denotes intellectual stagnation, implies in the context of her ideas that the state of *eikasia* seems to be the predominant mode of existence for the majority of us.

This analysis of the genres employed to denote the state of *eikasia* offers evidence that Murdoch introduces certain points of convergence between the genres of epic, chivalric romance and the Gothic. It is noteworthy that she seems to perceive these diverse genres as 'Romantic' in nature. Murdoch's taxonomy can be connected with her conviction that some literary traditions seem to promote a kind of individualism which leads to an excessive egocentrism, thus corrupting the moral life. The condition of modern society, diagnosed by Murdoch as hyper-individualistic, is rendered through her use of genres and allusions to texts which put emphasis on the role of the hero and contribute to disseminating the concept of an individual as the man of will. Any type of literature which promotes the kind of hero Murdoch calls 'existentialist' is deemed misleading by her. By introducing intertextual allusions referring to many anachronistic models of human interactions inscribed in various texts, Murdoch shows how our understanding of other people may be affected by an uncritical exposition to such texts. She seems to imply that in order to understand our own place in society, as well as to construct our identity, we tend to rely on these different conventions to simplify the complicated process of comprehending reality.

Murdoch signals that our projections, influenced by the various literary traditions, can truly affect people around us. The correlation between these cultural products and the changes taking place in her characters' consciousness can be linked to Murdoch's philosophy and her ideas concerning the influence of our inner life on the decisions we take. Murdoch's moral psychology ascribes a great significance to the process of how we reach the point of taking action. In her philosophical writings she emphasises the importance of conscious reverie in the decision-making process as opposed to the view that moral judgement is conditioned by our free will. The complicated relationship between the individual consciousness and the outside world is depicted in Murdoch's novels as being conditioned by her characters' cultural memory. In her fiction, genres and literary traditions become sources of inspiration for her

characters' personal narratives. Thus Murdoch's portrayal of questing knights shows that some social structures and models of behaviour fossilized in the genre can negatively affect her characters' subsequent actions. The portrayal of such characters as Randall in *An Unofficial Rose* or Danby in *Bruno's Dream* reveals that the experience of knowing the other and attending to her/him properly may be corrupted into a fantasy-driven adventure.

Murdoch's depiction of her characters and their responses to cultural products is closely connected with Plato's treatment of poetry and his ideas expressed in the second and the tenth book of *The Republic*. In Plato's dialogues poetry is severely criticised on account of the poets' lack of competence to describe the world accurately. Because poets are unable objectively to evaluate the picture of the world inscribed in their work and depend on public acclaim to survive, they are not trustworthy as providers of meaning. Moreover, the characters and situations created by the poets may induce mimicry and inspire readers to copy certain types of behaviour without thinking.

In Murdoch's fiction this penchant for mimicking, understood as a process of copying which requires psychological involvement, is present in her depiction of characters who, fascinated by different ideas derived from their cultural heritage, mindlessly implement these models in real life. Eager to re-enact familiar scenarios and to take on the role of admired heroes, such characters illustrate the consequences of excessive involvement with literary texts feared by Plato. Murdoch's depiction of her characters' responses to various types of texts illustrates the undeniable magnetic appeal of art which, unless consciously scrutinised, may negatively affect our moral life.

In Murdoch's understanding and consequently in her depiction, the experience of reading leaves permanent traces in our memory in the forms of models which may be unconsciously retrieved, especially while encountering the other. The migration of tropes and their subsequent incorporation in the characters' fantasies is a problem which Murdoch seems to be particularly concerned about. Taking into consideration that interpretation is a complex process in which we evoke aesthetic categories, socio-cultural norms and forms of knowledge, Murdoch seems to warn us that each text, each role model, should be critically evaluated before we embrace it.

This examination of Murdoch's novels reveals that in her understanding reading is a two-way communication process. Literature ceases to be a form of pure entertainment, or an object of aesthetic contemplation, because encounters with cultural products reverberate in



our personal narratives and may influence our actions. Additionally, Murdoch's careful evaluation of the literary canon encourages her readers to form their own critical judgements on the texts that shape their outlook. Engaged in a careful assessment of her own cultural heritage, she seems to emphasize the significance of literature in our moral as well as intellectual development.

Murdoch demonstrates that culture may be a formative source of identity, but that excessive reliance on culture as a source of knowledge may result in dangerous misconceptions. Therefore, her selective approach towards Western culture, the re-reading and revaluation of the texts that create our literary canon, encourages readers to make more careful choices, to judiciously select the texts with which they preoccupy themselves. What Murdoch seems to suggest is that, rather than relinquishing our cultural heritage and censoring all of our poets and rhapsodes, we should focus on developing a critical distance towards them.

Murdoch's artistic effort in depicting the consequences of mindless mimicry seems to suggest that she is concerned with increasing the awareness of her readers, crucially needed in this time of a massive information boom. Immersed in an influx of information and images, modern man should continuously strive to remain critical and cautious. Therefore, Murdoch's critique of art and cultural heritage in general remains particularly relevant at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Moreover, Murdoch's novels, translating Plato's philosophical thoughts into the elements of narrative such as imagery, characterization and dialogues, deepen our understanding of his ideas by making us rediscover them in the guise of new patterns and motifs.

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